

NFL DRAFT

Special Issue

PREVIEW

Sporting News

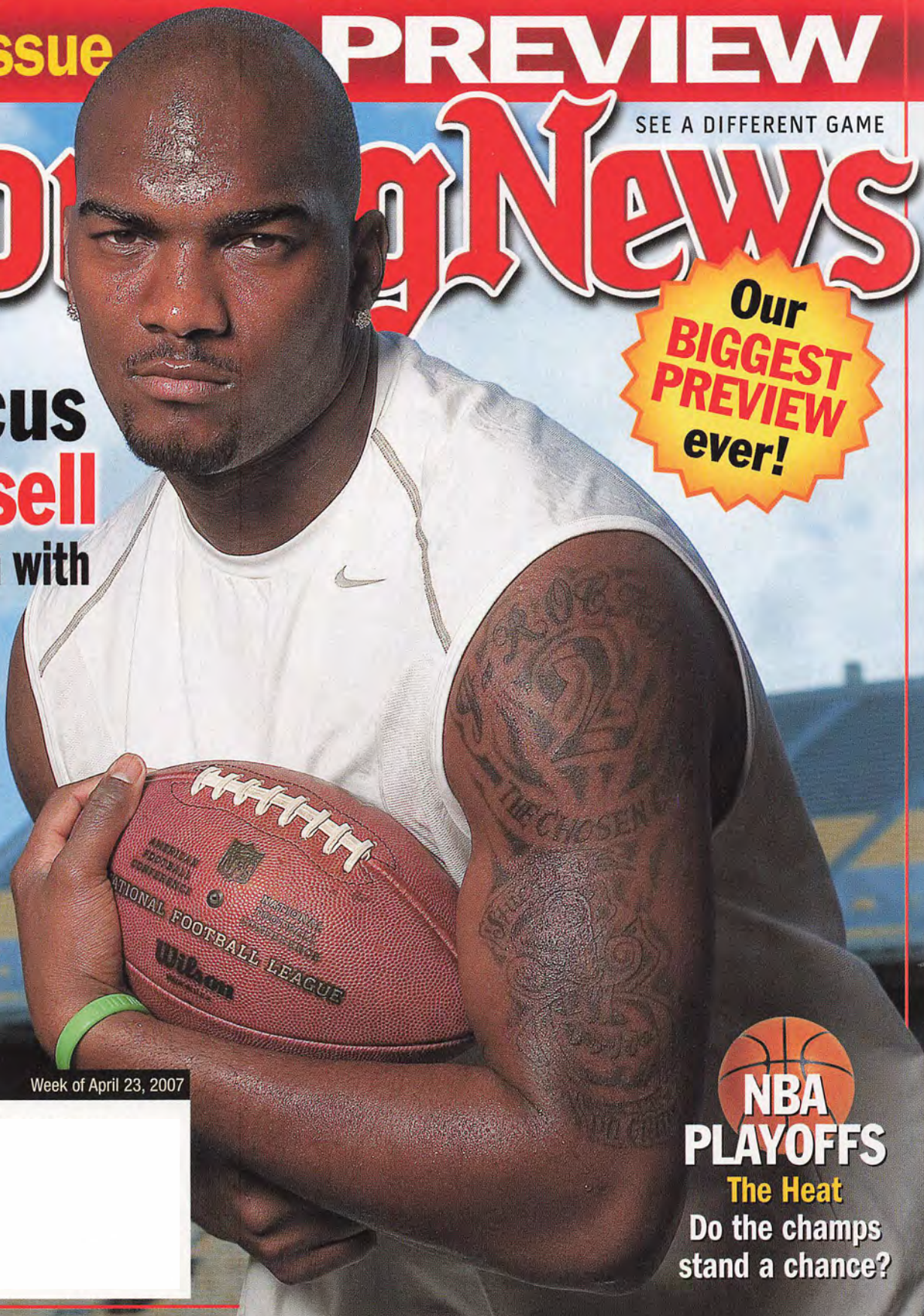
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Week of April 23, 2007

**NBA
PLAYOFFS**
The Heat
Do the champs
stand a chance?





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THIS WEEK

> **NBA: PLAYOFF PREVIEW**

14 Joint of concern

The Heat has a lot riding on Dwyane Wade's dislocated shoulder—probably too much to mount a title defense. *By Sean Deveney* **Plus**, Get the skinny on the top postseason matchups, teams and players in Instant Expert.

COVER STORY

> **NFL: DRAFT PREVIEW**

20 Let the feast begin

The draft has been offering a wide array of cuisine for talent-starved NFL teams since 1936. Grab a fork and dig in with our blowout coverage.

22 Feed the need? The Raiders' quandary at No. 1: take the best player or fill the biggest hole? *By Paul Atner*

26 Big Value Board Take the guesswork out of identifying draft-day steals and reaches by finding out where the 2007 prospects *should* be taken. *By War Room scouts*

28 Going up? A look at the players and teams that will be movin' and shakin'—or stallin' and sinkin'—on draft day. *By War Room scouts*

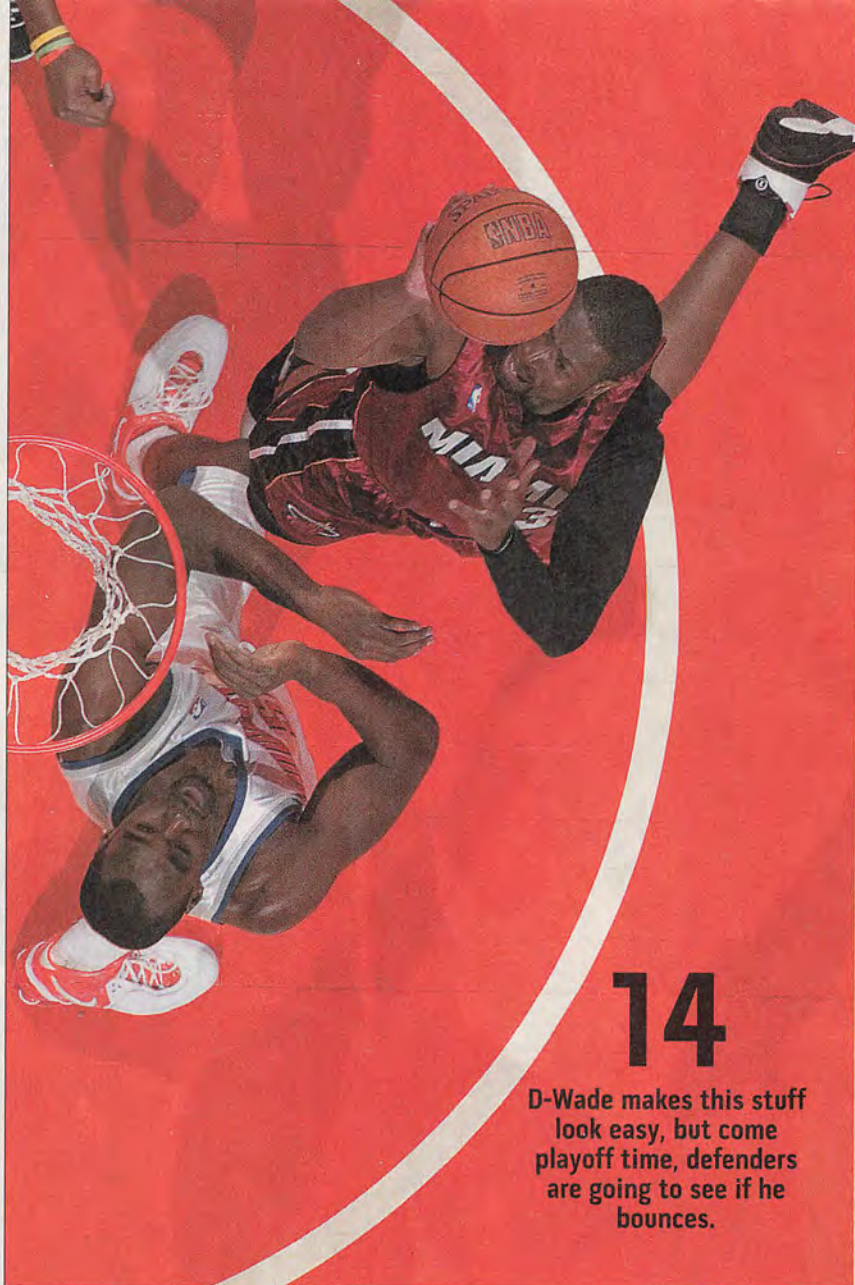
30 That's the spot Position-by-position analysis of the players who will hear their names called on draft day. *By War Room scouts*

48 Team outlooks Find out what your team—and the other 31 you need to keep an eye on—are thinking.



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Do you know this man? He's exactly the eighth-best cornerback in the draft—or so our scouts tell us.



14
D-Wade makes this stuff look easy, but come playoff time, defenders are going to see if he bounces.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

KNOW IT ALL

- 6 To Know List** Is this the end of the Spurs and Pistons as we know them?
- 8 On Deck** Drink in playoff action, whether you prefer it on ice or with the rock.
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COVER: ALBERT DICKSON / SN

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This week on SportingNews .COM

/FANTASY BASEBALL/ Don't get rocked

Our Fantasy Source experts are working overtime to make sure your team gets off to a good start. Check out their strategies and advice in this week's columns at fantasygames.sportingnews.com/baseball.

Monday: Prospect Watch

Tuesday: Hit Parade

Wednesday: Inside Pitch

Thursday: Inside the A.L.

Friday: Best of the Blogs

Saturday: The Week Ahead

/NBA/ Every shot counts even more

The NBA is ready to get the post-season under way. Get primed for the playoffs with Sean Deveney's blog. Go to sportingnews.com/experts/sean-deveney.

/NHL/ On to the next level

Our experts will have you raring to go for the second round of the playoffs. Check in with Kara Yorio and Ray Slover at sportingnews.com/nhl.

/NFL DRAFT/ Who's on the clock?

There are plenty of story lines to follow during the NFL draft—such as, how far will **Brady Quinn** fall?—and we'll get to all of them. Check in the entire weekend for the War Room's pick-by-pick analysis, Vinnie Iyer's live blog, a breakdown of winners and losers and more. Go to sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.



MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ /MEMBERS/ Five-star profile

Member name: DaDo

Member since: September 2004


Hometown: Günzburg, Germany

Favorite teams: Yankees, Titans, Mavericks and Penguins

How he keeps up with U.S. sports: SportingNews.com, of course, and NASN.com, a "great channel in Europe for American sports."

On baseball: "Youth should take over, and maybe then there will be a clean future for the sport."

Who's the best player available in the NFL draft from a Titans fan's perspective? "Calvin Johnson, WR, Georgia Tech. He's a freak of nature, and wide receiver is a big need for the Titans."

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THE FIRST NEWSWEEKLY IN SPORTS

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TO KNOW LIST

7 things to make you an INSTANT EXPERT this week

1 THE MAIN EVENT Old dogs, no more tricks

If the NBA is to surge in popularity to where it hasn't been—by any common-sense measure—since the Jordan era, it likely will have to do so without the Spurs and Pistons contending for the championship.

And not only because the West's and East's longest-running powerhouses are a few blown fuses from crisis mode.

The Spurs have spent a decade at or near the top of the overall league standings. The Pistons have rung up six consecutive seasons of at least 50 wins. Anybody can respect that kind of success. But the harsh truth is most of America has found both teams to be, well, boring.

Phoenix, our pick to win the 2007 title (*see page 14*), is one of the most fun teams to watch since the Showtime Lakers. For the sake of pro basketball in this country and beyond, go ahead and root for the Suns.

**For the sake of
pro basketball
in this country
and beyond, go
ahead and root
for the Suns.**

While you're at it, pull for the Cavaliers or the Bulls in the East. The latter take after the Suns on offense—constant motion, ballhandlers all over the floor and tons of open shots—and bring rising stars, a top market and a relatively iconic franchise to the table. The former have LeBron James—the key guy in all of this.

Kobe Bryant came close, but there won't be a legit "next Jordan"—in ability

and drawing power—until LeBron hoists the trophy.

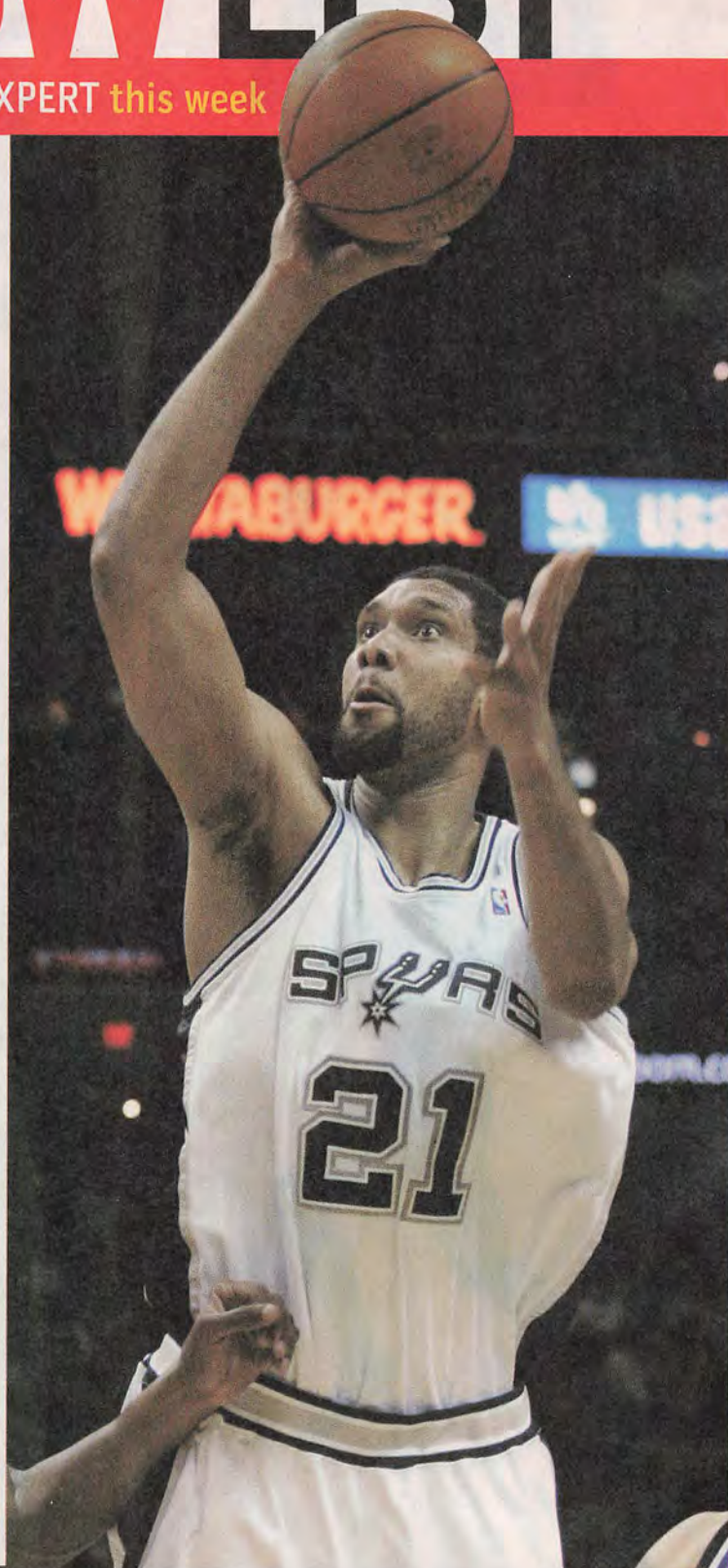
But back to the old dogs. Tim Duncan, Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili are locked up at least through 2010, but the rest of the Spurs' roster will be in a sad state next season (*more* Robert Horry, Brent Barry, Michael Finley and Bruce Bowen!?) unless the team somehow pulls off a couple of major trades. Don't hold your breath.

The Pistons probably will also revolve around the same nucleus—Chauncey Billups, Rip Hamilton, Rasheed Wallace and Tayshaun Prince—but only Prince is on the upside of his career, and you wouldn't wish the balance of the current roster on anyone.

Meanwhile, the Cavs, Bulls and even the Raptors are only beginning the good times.

Admire what the Spurs and Pistons have accomplished because they more than deserve it. If you'll be glad to see them fade away ... well, don't beat yourself up over it. —Steve Greenberg

Duncan never quite has put the fun in Big Fundamental.



ERIC GAY / AP

NEWS YOU
CAN'T USE

Cubs to continue 'shock and awe' campaign against weakening Piniella >> Cox: Braves have look of legitimate playoff loser >> Pizza guy's neighbor Ea

TOM WILSON / WWW.FANSLOVEBASEBALL.COM

2

GET IT BEFORE IT'S HOT

Says Tom Wilson, creator of the Foam Asterisk: 'This little foam asterisk simply allows the fans to demonstrate, in a peaceful, simple way, that we were not blind. We were not fooled. We did not look the other way while the integrity of the game was ground into the dirt.' Available at fanslovebaseball.com.



3

YOU HEARD IT HERE

'He's a no-brainer, the cleanest—no flaws.'

—Dolphins G.M. Randy Mueller on wide receiver Calvin Johnson, who has a chance to sneak into the top spot in the upcoming NFL draft (see page 22)



BOB LEVERONE / SN

4

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BASEBALL RIVALRIES

Warm up to the good stuff

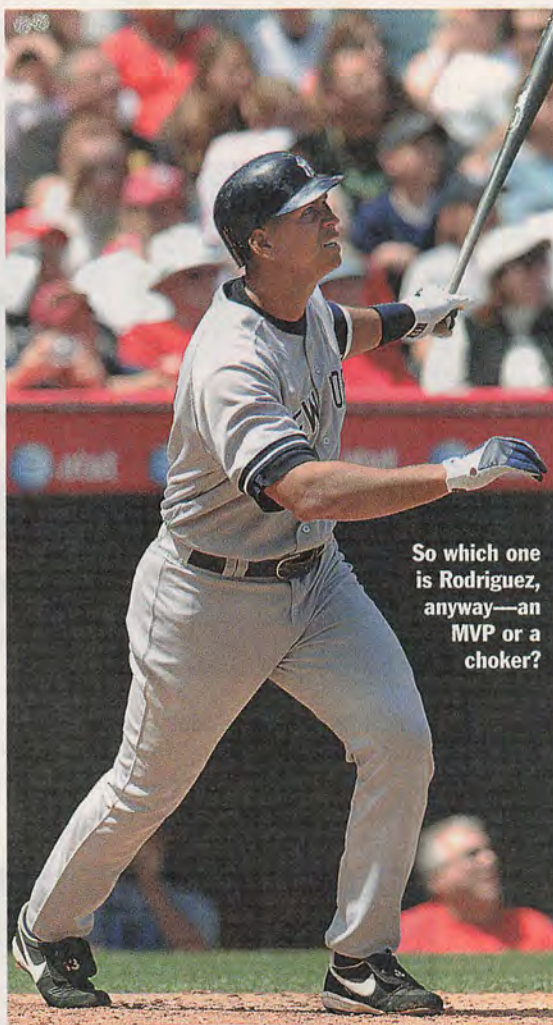
The surest sign the baseball season is heating up:

- a Lou Piniella goes off
- b The temperature hits 50 in Boston
- c The Yankees meet the Red Sox and the Cubs face the Cardinals

The correct answer, of course, is all of the above—but let's focus on "c." Two old rivalries, each with a new twist.

Yankees at Red Sox (Friday-Sunday). Assuming the weather cooperates, a certain Sox righthander will create another viewing frenzy in Japan when he squares off against Hideki Matsui, still the most popular player in their homeland. Of course, N.Y.-Boston doesn't need Dice-K when there's a chance the game will come down to Mariano vs. Manny or A-Rod vs. Papelbon. Heck, A-Rod vs. his rep with the game on the line makes this must-see TV.

Cardinals at Cubs (Friday-Sunday). Forget the dugout battle between Piniella and Tony La Russa. The bad blood here will focus on Jason Marquis vs. the team that barely lifted a finger to bring him back. If the matchups hold, Marquis not only will face the Cardinals in Chicago but he'll get them again the following weekend in St. Louis. Hot times, indeed. —Stan McNeal



So which one is Rodriguez, anyway—an MVP or a choker?

JOHN CORDES FOR SN

5

QUICK CLICKS

The joy puck club

I just checked in with the NHL home office, and it turns out this playoff season is gonna go straight through August.

Or at least it feels that way to actor Tom Cavanagh, one of several celebrities blogging during the playoffs at NHL.com/blogcentral. Model Christie Brinkley and actors David Boreanaz (*Bones*) and Brian Baumgartner (Kevin from *The Office*) are among the hockey nuts sharing their insights on four-overtime games, goalie strategy and game-viewing rituals. Because when the postseason lasts forever, sometimes you need a little company.

—Tricia Garner



Who says playoff hockey more than Brinkley?

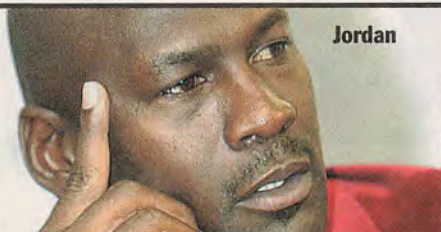
JULIE JACOBSON / AP

6

TELEVISION

Draft picks

Don't stop 'til you get enough of the NFL draft. NFL Network is offering a dozen bonus hours of draft coverage to pigskin-hungry fans from now until May 14. The content, which can be accessed through NFL Network On Demand, includes 5-minute profiles of 100 top draft prospects. Watch video footage from the Scouting Combine, Senior Bowl and college games and decide which players you can't get enough of. —T.G.



Jordan

NELL REDMOND / AP

7

LIFESTYLES

That's gonna leave a mark

Michael Jordan's pending divorce from his wife of nearly 18 years, Juanita Vanoy, could cost the man in excess of \$150 million, according to *Forbes* magazine. That would top Neil Diamond's 1996 whopper on the all-time celeb charts and just might cut into M.J.'s cigars-per-18 ratio.

ON DECK

The week ahead in sports



From the sand, the fringe or the middle of the green, Tiger is, uh, pretty good.

CHRIS O'MEARA / AP

BOB HILLE'S STARTING

5

THIS I GOTTA SEE All times Eastern

PICK of the WEEK



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

Winning and Phoenix are almost synonymous for Harvick.

SAT 21

NBA playoff openers (3 p.m., ABC; 5:30 and 8, ESPN). It's hard to beat the unpredictability of the first round in this league, although the sun setting in the West comes darn close.

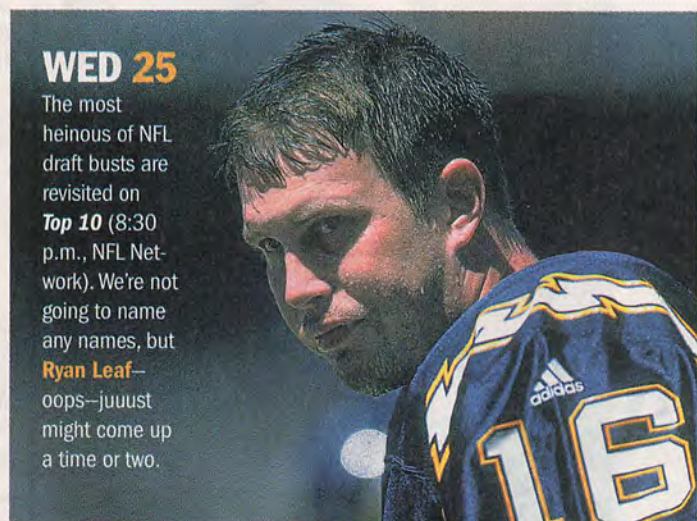
■ **Subway Fresh Fit 500** (8 p.m., FOX). Kevin Harvick won both Cup races in Phoenix last year, which makes him 1B to Jared's 1A around these parts.

SUN 22 Yankees at Red Sox (8 p.m., ESPN). Look, we know it's April and you're still a little rusty, so we'll start with the basics. You see, kids, the Yanks and Sox have a little bit of a history ...

MON 23 Being the higher seed doesn't mean all that much in the **NHL playoffs** (7 and 10 p.m., Versus)—pound for pound, it's simply the best postseason in pro sports. In other words, that regular season you ignored? You really didn't miss anything.

WED 25

The most heinous of NFL draft busts are revisited on **Top 10** (8:30 p.m., NFL Network). We're not going to name any names, but **Ryan Leaf**—oops—juuust might come up a time or two.



TODD WASHAW FOR SN

THU 26 Speaking of **Top 10** (8 p.m., Golf Channel): different show, different network, different kind of guy as Tiger Woods' finest short-game moments are relived. Of course, *short* is relative when talking about a man who could outdrive you with his lob wedge. —Steve Greenberg

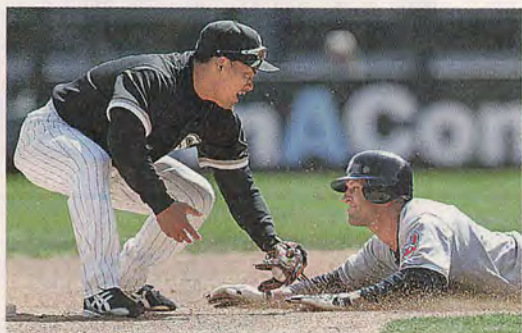
COMING AT YOU

In the April 30 issue

Inside baseball's best division. You can't always buy your way to the top; the American League Central teams—well, except the Royals—prove there are other ways to become perennial World Series contenders. How have the Indians, Tigers, Twins and White Sox done it? What are each team's keys to a successful 2007? How long will the good times last?

■ The Ultimate NFL Mock Draft! And this year, we're nailing all 32 first-round picks or your money ba—wait, maybe we better not go there.

■ The NBA playoffs are a marathon, not a sprint. You been doing your stretches, T-Mac?



BRIAN KERSEY / AP

It could be a bang-bang (or, for that matter, a bang-bang-bang-bang finish) in the Central.

1 Baseball injuries. After six weeks of "getting into shape," my team's ace is on the D.L. He hurt himself bending over backward to say baseball players are athletes.

2 The NHL playoffs. Hockey fans across the continent are riveted, meaning Versus' ratings have skyrocketed past those of PBS' reruns of the oil-painting dead guy.

3 The Nationals. They can't pitch, they can't hit, and they can't field. In fact, typically to be this bad at your job in Washington, you have to have been elected.

4 Michael Waltrip. He dozed off and rolled his Land Cruiser last week, proof that it's not just during races that he's asleep at the wheel of a Toyota.

5 The NFL schedule. Some were calling the day it was announced a national holiday. Which makes some sense because now the Raiders know which 16 Sundays to take off in the fall.

Sports talk with Oscar De La Hoya

World champion boxer, Olympic gold medal winner

SN: I hear you pitched a little growing up. What kind of pitcher were you?

DE LA HOYA: I can't say a Fernando Valenzuela type because he had the famous screwball. I was more of a Randy Johnson type. I'd just go out there and—*wham!*—throw it down the middle as fast as I could.

SN: What other sports do you play?

DE LA HOYA: I'm a huge golfer. I'm a golf freak.

SN: Ever had a hole in one?

DE LA HOYA: I've had one. It was 178 yards, a par 3, a little downhill. Hit it about 8 feet past the hole and spun it back, and it went in the hole.

SN: What's the one moment in your boxing career that sticks out in your mind?

DE LA HOYA: The one I treasure the most will always be the gold medal. Barcelona, 1992, was the most satisfying moment of my career, amateur or pro. In boxing, at the professional level, you can win world titles and lose world titles, but that gold medal will be mine forever.

SN: How about a prediction for your upcoming fight against Floyd Mayweather



BRENNAN LINSLEY / AP

Some predict De La Hoya-Mayweather will set nonheavyweight purse records. All De La Hoya predicts is that he'll win.

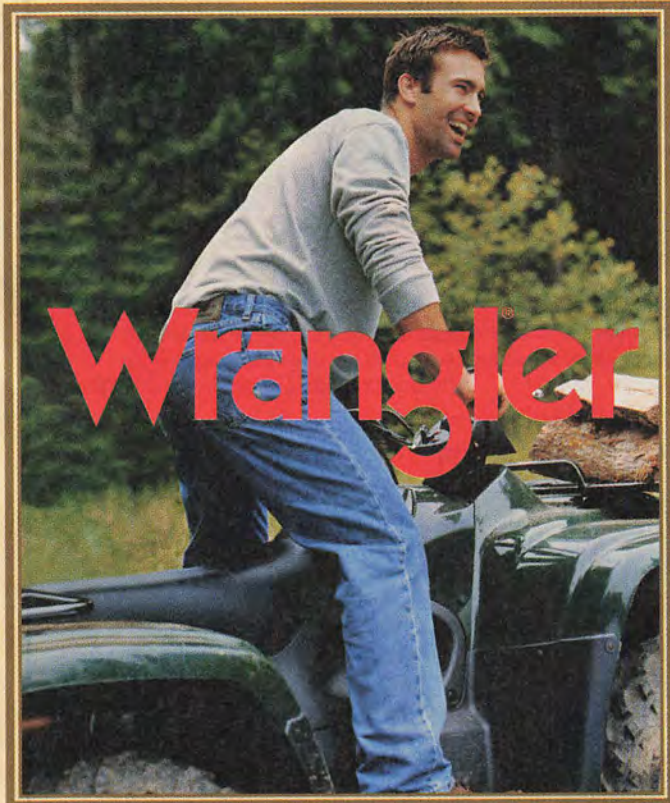
(May 5, HBO pay-per-view)?

DE LA HOYA: A win. I never predict round or anything like that, but I really, truly desire a knockout in this fight. A knockout has to happen—that's how much I want to win this fight. I just cannot see this fight going 12 rounds.

SN: What did you think of the *Rocky Balboa* movie?

DE LA HOYA: You know what? I was pleasantly surprised. At first I thought it was going to be cheesy, but the story line was great. It was very motivating. When I heard the *Rocky* theme song, I got chills. Those are the movies that I watch to pump me up—the *Rocky* movies and *Gladiator* and those types of movies.

—Ryan Fagan



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UNC will be the favorite to win it all with Tyler Hansbrough and Ty Lawson back next season. —*tkbone via SportingNews.com*

■ I would take Kevin Durant first in the NBA draft (SN, April 9). Greg Oden shows promise, but I don't see any difference between him and Kelvin Cato at this point. I believe Durant is more of a sure thing.

—*gman1969 via SportingNews.com*

■ I think the NFL did the right thing with Pacman Jones and Chris Henry. I am pleasantly surprised. The only thing that I remain cynical about is whether the NFL will do the same thing when a *major* star gets into serious trouble. —*GrammarBoss via SportingNews.com*

■ Sadly, I really think this has less to do with the league's reputation or teaching Pacman Jones a lesson than it does with Roger Goodell's trying to brand his style of leadership. This is his first "crisis," and the league is looking to see how he responds. —*titansbaby-titans via SportingNews.com*

■ I have to disagree with the assertion that John Kerry and John Edwards could beat George Bush and Dick Cheney in basketball (SN, April 9). At 6-4, Kerry might be able to dunk on Bush, but Kerry is too weak on defense. —*Chris Zavadil, Madison, Neb.*

■ Don Imus made a big mistake and has tainted what the women of Rutgers accomplished by making his comments the story of their terrific season. These women should still be very proud of what they achieved. —*slimshady2k3 via SportingNews.com*

RADIO★STAR

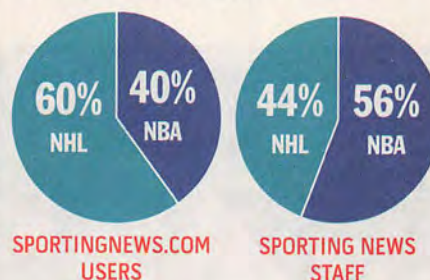
Real talk from a fan on Sporting News Radio

'We've got another week where the big stories are suspensions, racist remarks and dropped rape charges. Isn't the world of sports supposed to be a distraction from real-life problems? It's about time people start caring more about wins and losses than hearings and suspensions.'

—*Brian in Charlotte on the Arnie Spanier Show*

POLLING PLACE

Which will you watch more of, the NBA playoffs or the NHL playoffs?



GMC BLOG LIKE THE PROS

Posted by ryan61285

Mariano Rivera. Joe Nathan. Francisco Rodriguez. Jonathan Papelbon. What do all of these men have in common?

If you guessed that they all drive expensive cars, you are only partially correct. These four pitchers will be their team's most valuable players by the end of the season. The glitz and glamour of the big leagues is in the long ball. We all know by now that



Papelbon

chicks dig it. But for all the walkoff homers and batting titles, there's only one thing that will bring a team to the promised land: a good closer.

Rivera, Nathan, Rodriguez and Papelbon all have that makeup. That "I'm better than you any day of the week" mentality gives them the ability to finish games like Jack Bauer mows down terrorists.

To read more of ryan 61285's blog, visit **SPORTINGBLOGS** at sportingnews.com.

MY TURN

sdeveney@sportingnews.com



Sean Deveney

111 percent

The house of James

It's—hmm, what's that word?—oh, yeah. *BIG*.

Remember when Shaq first moved to South Florida and bought that 19,000-square-foot mansion on Star Island, the same place once owned by Rony Seikaly? Nice place, sure, but you have to wonder, if you have only 19,000 square feet, where the heck are you supposed to put the bowling alley?

Not far from Shaq's house is Alex Rodriguez's Biscayne Bay domicile, a respectable 8,310-square-foot home that might be big enough for a great room but not a great *and* a grand room. Ask yourself: If you don't have a grand Room to make the great room feel shabby, what's the point in having either?

Or how about Terrell Owens' old place across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, the one that housed an indoor basketball court and a driveway that, as it happened, was perfect for shirtless sit-ups? That place was 7,700 square feet—7,700! How do you cram six bathrooms into a hovel like that?

Now, LeBron James knows how to build a house. Take Shaq's shanty, A-Rod's abode and T.O.'s tepee and stack them up, and you'll get just about the square footage of the place James is building in the Akron suburb of Bath Township—a total of 35,440, to be com-

pleted next year. This place will have the bowling alley, great room, grand room and six bathrooms that the homes of other sporting stars can't quite muster. The place is so enormous LeBron will have *nine*

next-door neighbors, thus destroying the very premise of next-door neighbors. Yes, as athlete manors go, James soon will be king.

But the blueprints of LeBron's new place present more questions than answers. For example, the plans call for a two-story, 40-by-56 walk-in closet. The plans say nothing, though, about emergency lighting—you know, in case James gets lost in

there. Will there be maps? A GPS system? Homing pigeons? What good is a walk-in if you're not sure you'll be able to walk out?

How about artwork? The man who once said, "LeBron stays humble just by being LeBron," is having a limestone bas-relief sculpture of his head made (headband included) to decorate the entryway, much as Ramses the Great once did at Luxor temple. It may be asked, "Is it appropriate for LeBron to be wearing his headband in the sculpture?" A valid question—but then, you never see a rendering of Ramses without the ol'



So far, so good at Chez 'Bron. Well, maybe. Who could tell?

Khepresh, do you?

There are other questions, of course. Will the house's three-story aquarium feature fishing expeditions? How about this casino on the blueprints? Will it have a sports book? If so, what happens when someone bets against the Cavs?

To me, though, the most important question concerns the barber shop, because I can't stop thinking about what that poor barber is going to do on days LeBron does not need a haircut. How many times can the guy sweep the dang floor? Is Drew Gooden allowed to stop by for a shave, a buffing and a discussion of that one puffy patch of neck hair he keeps intact? Will the barber faint every time Anderson Varejao visits?

One room on the blueprint elicits nothing but sound advice from us, the public: Your house is your business, LeBron, but please keep Shaq out of the custom-built recording studio. Just because he couldn't fit one in his meager house doesn't mean he should be using yours to expose us all to another *I Know I Got Skillz*.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

WE EXAMINED EVERYTHING.



AND OVERLOOKED NOTHING.

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What's better than going to a baseball game, a football game and a race?
Doing it all—and then some—in a 24-hour period. *By Steve Greenberg*



Quoth the poet, "There's just too much to see waiting in front of me, and I know that I just can't go wrong." I am referring, of course, to Jimmy Buffett, who came of age in Nashville in the late 1960s before setting sail for Margaritaville. His words: an anthem all sports fans should never stop singing.

Changes in latitude are a very good thing, much as sports—anytime, anywhere—are a very good thing. When you combine the two, you make magic. Anytime is a good time to hit the road and see sports as you've never seen them before. Anywhere is a good place to do it.

If we couldn't laugh ...

I went to Nashville and all I got was a walkoff home run, a Carl Edwards back flip and 17 touchdowns.

Not to mention a honky-tonk buzz that's still kickin' long after the last of the Pabst Blue Ribbons.

And I got it all in 24 hours.

As a guy who sometimes misses the good time that's right under my nose, the goal was to pummel my senses with three types of sporting events I'd never witnessed and in a place I'd never visited. The events: a minor league baseball game on Friday evening and a car race and Arena Football League game on Saturday.

Greer Stadium, home of the Class AAA Sounds, was a barren wasteland. Not that there's anything wrong with that on a 32-degree night—child's play in Milwaukee, where the big-club Brewers play, but death-defying by Nashville standards. With only a few hundred stout souls in the stands and a hundred more partying inside the upper-deck bar, Slugger's, I had the run of the joint, and it was wonderful.

I found the Sounds' G.M., Glenn Yaeger, and he gave me a tour of the stadium. A couple of underdressed Chicago guys, we laughed at the "cold" as we checked out three outfield party decks, admired the one-of-a-kind guitar-shaped scoreboard and breathed in the sultry stench of Chicago-style hot dogs under the stands.

As Yaeger reminded me, they play baseball there, too. The Sounds have made the Pacific Coast League playoffs

Edwards looks pretty natural with that winner's six string. *Freebird!*

Wrangler Real. Comfortable. Jeans.

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three of the past four years. Don Mattingly, Willie McGee, Rob Dibble, Paul O'Neill, Magglio Ordonez, Aramis Ramirez—some mighty big names have been through Nashville.

The Sounds played the New Orleans Zephyrs, who had Ricky Ledee, Fernando Tatis and Mike DiFelice in the lineup and Sandy Alomar Jr. and Chan Ho Park in the dugout. Nothing wrong with those guys. As I sat behind the third base dugout with



That's Ricky Ledee getting forced out at second on a night that was too dang cold for stuff like sliding.



ALAN POZNER / THE TENNESSEAN

the game tied in the bottom of the ninth, not exactly reveling in my stupidity for failing to bring a jacket, Callix Crabbe sent a rocket over the right-center field wall. The crowd, such as it was, went wild. Children took the field to run the bases. Good times. It was 9:38.

At 10:01 I walked into Robert's Western World on Broadway because when a Jew from the north is in Rome, he hits a honky-tonk or four. Brazilbilly rocked the stage, I made friends up and down the block who will never remember me, and I hit the hay at 2.



HEATHER BYRD / THE TENNESSEAN

Brazilbilly at Robert's—it doesn't get much better. Whose round is it?

... we would all go insane

A bit of unsolicited advice for all you fish-out-of-water types: Get over it. I pulled in at Nashville SuperSpeedway Saturday morning and, lo and behold, the Daytona 500 was under way. Technically, it was an ARCA race—the undercard for the NASCAR Busch Series' Pepsi 300—but I am not exaggerating when I say it was one of the coolest things I have ever seen. The cars go *much* faster, and are *much* louder, than they appear to on TV.

Not that I watch auto racing on TV. If the Daytona 500 is on, I watch Lakers at Suns. But the Busch race? Ridiculously entertaining. It's true what many a colleague has told me: You have to go to a race to *get* it. I could not take my eyes off the No. 60 Ford as Edwards tore through the field. I *wanted* that back flip. At 5:08, I got it. That Carl Edwards—185 pounds of real man.

And then, at 5:16, I wedged a hundred pounds more behind the wheel of my compact rental and made my move for downtown Nashville and the Arena game between the Kats and the Chicago Rush (*my* Chicago Rush) at Gaylord Entertainment Center.

Kickoff was a few minutes after 7, and about 4 seconds after that the score was 21-14. Midway through the first quarter, I wondered how many points Dame Judi Dench and seven of her closest friends could hang on the Kats. Well before the game went final at 66-54 in favor of the defending champion Rush, it struck me that there is no such thing as a bad touchdown.

An Arena game is like a barroom brawl: fun and exciting—in a sick, twisted way—as long as it isn't you getting smashed into the wall. There is no defending yourself down on that tiny field. Two Kats were ejected for throwing punches, including a linebacker who had sent his kicker to the hospital in a locker room fight in college.

The star of the game: the PA announcer. Like you see in bad sports movies, he actually provided a running commentary throughout the game. "I'd like to see that again," he shared after a penalty against the home team. As the Kats' second ejectee stormed off the field, the PA guy assaulted eardrums with, "Section 116 gets the Krispy Kremes!"

I was unnaturally happy for the good folks in Section 116. The game was a blast. The trip was a blast. It was 9:38. The hotel bed beckoned, but so did Tootsies Orchid Lounge on Broadway. It wasn't a tough call.

The go network

I chose Nashville because it's affordable, it's fun and it has lots of sports teams in season at all times. Flight plus hotel for two weekend nights probably will be doable for under \$500. Decent tickets for a Triple-A-Busch-Arena triftecta can be had for no more than \$60 combined.

You'll spend more—or less—depending where you go, but many of the best U.S. getaway cities (that aren't total big league sports towns) have a more robust pro sports scene than you might think. Las Vegas, for example, offers pro baseball, basketball, football and hockey plus a racetrack. Get online and start mixing and matching league schedules. —S.G.



SHELLEY MAYS / THE TENNESSEAN

What is this—a tackle in an Arena game? Well, lost amid all the touchdowns, there usually are a few.

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NBA PLAYOFFS PREVIEW

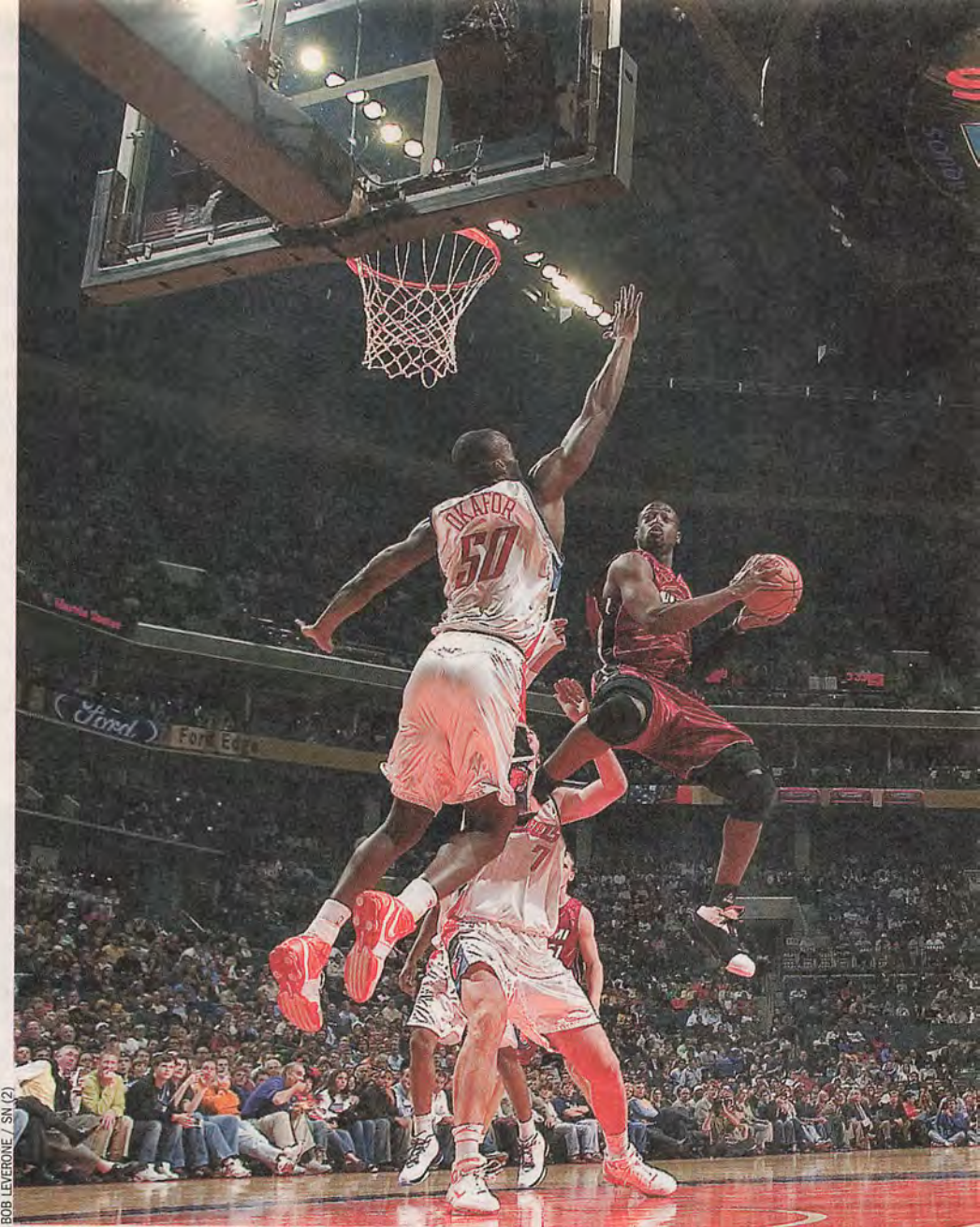
The Heat has a lot riding on Dwyane Wade's dislocated shoulder—probably too much to mount a title defense *By Sean Deveney*

Sixteen. That's the number to keep in mind here. In the history of the NBA, no championship team's leading scorer has missed more than 16 games. In fact, only three times in the 57 years that the league has handed out a championship trophy has the champion's top scorer been on the shelf for 10 or more regular-season games—Hakeem Olajuwon missed 10 games for the 1994-95 Rockets, Shaquille O'Neal missed 15 for the 2001-02 Lakers and Tim Duncan had 16 DNP's for the 2004-05 Spurs. The history is clear: A hobbled star means no hardware.

So, on the eve of the NBA playoffs, one wonders what Dwyane Wade is trying to accomplish. He is the Heat's leading scorer with a 27.8-point average and was the MVP of Miami's run to a title last year. But he has missed 30 games, the last 23 the result of a nasty dislocated shoulder suffered in late February—an injury that can recur easily if not repaired by surgery. Wade has put off that option until after the playoffs, instead choosing to stuff his balky shoulder into a compression sleeve and gamble on his team's title defense. Wade's chutzpah is praiseworthy, but let's face it: Thirty missed games is a lot more than 16. If history has a say, Wade's hopes of leading Miami to back-to-back championships are proportionately dim.

Try to think of a player in the history of the league who has attempted what Wade is about to undertake. Not just playing through pain, not just all those missed games, but sitting out 45 days in the heat of the stretch run—coming back with a notoriously fickle injury and returning to the floor just 13 days before the playoffs. We've never seen anything quite like it. "Lots of guys have had to play hurt before, but I can't recall this particular injury being something that someone has tried to play through," Pistons president Joe Dumars says. "I commend his toughness."

The closest comparison might be Michael Jordan, who ended his minor league baseball dabbling in time to play the final 17 games of the 1994-95 regular season and take part in an ill-fated playoff run—but even that falls short. "That was a much different scenario," says Bucks



coach Larry Krystkowiak, a member of that Chicago team. "Michael had been out playing baseball. He had some great games in there, but it was a challenge for him to be consistent. Dwyane is not going to go through that level of adjustment, but he will have his own rust to shake off. And having that injury to be concerned about adds a whole other level to what he is going to deal with."

Hall of Famer Rick Barry says, "As far as what Dwyane is doing, no one comes to mind," but count Barry among those who can understand the driving force behind Wade's return—the same force that drove Boston's Kevin McHale to play on a damaged ankle, that drove Willis Reed to limp out of the locker room for the Knicks, that drove Bob Pettit to play in The Finals with a broken wrist. Barry has been there. As a player for the Warriors, he sprained his ankle before the 1967 Finals. Rather than miss a chance at a

championship, he was shot up with cortisone before each game and again at halftime. "The pain was awful, but there was no way I was going to miss those games," Barry says. "As a player, you can sense when you are close, and you know that there's no guarantee that you'll get back there. I'd guess that's what Dwyane is thinking. He has that championship on his mind."

But, even with Wade on the floor, it seems a championship should be far from Miami's mind. This team has limped and bungled its way through a disastrous season. O'Neal had knee surgery back in November, and by season's end he had missed more than 40 games. Coach Pat Riley was so irritated by his team's lack of preparation that he deactivated Antoine Walker and James Posey in January because they were out of shape. Riley also gave himself some time off—to recover from hip and knee surgeries—and handed the team to assistant Ron Rothstein for



Joint of concern



Wade had better continue to lead with his right shoulder as the Heat heads into the playoffs. The left one is a little iffy.

30 games. The Heat's starting five for the playoffs did not start a single game together until the season's final week.

Mid-April has been especially rough. Posey was arrested for drunken driving, Gary Payton suffered a torn calf muscle, Udonis Haslem was hobbled by a groin injury, and the team endured back-to-back losses to Charlotte that forced Miami to open the playoffs on the road—a position from which the Heat likely will play no matter how far it advances in the playoffs. Even if Miami makes it out of the first round, the team likely will face Detroit, the East's best team, in the conference semifinals. Says Riley: "We're going to have probably the toughest ride any defending champion has ever had."

If you can't take the Heat—and we can't—take the Suns

Dwyane Wade's return may add a level of intrigue to the Eastern Conference picture, but you won't see the Heat popping up in any Finals predictions around here. The Pistons have replaced the wounded Heat, our preseason pick to win the East, as our choice to fall to the Suns in The Finals.

Picking Detroit in the East is easy, of course. But it's the West—with league superpowers Dallas, Phoenix and San Antonio—that is likely to produce this year's champ. As one Western Conference scout says, "Close your eyes, pick one of those three, and you could make a very good argument for why they'll win it."

Dallas is the favorite, with home-court advantage, the likelihood of facing a relatively easy opponent in the second round (the Spurs and Suns will have to whale on each other in Round 2) and the experience of having beaten Phoenix and San Antonio last year on its way to The Finals. The Spurs, meanwhile, have become the trendy late-season pick thanks to a second half surge in which they nearly caught Phoenix for the second seed.

But the pick here remains the Suns, and we have three reasons:

■ **Amare Stoudemire.** Phoenix's problem in last season's playoffs was its inability to find consistent inside scoring with Stoudemire out, recovering from microfracture surgery. That won't be the case this year. Stoudemire's return to health was more complete than expected—he is averaging 20.3 points and a career-high 9.7 rebounds despite a borderline awful November. Look for Phoenix to feed Stoudemire in crunch time, which could lead to 2005-type playoff numbers: 29.9 points and 10.7 rebounds.

■ **Depth.** Phoenix is not the West's deepest team, but this is the deepest team the Suns have brought to the postseason in years. Leandro Barbosa has matured as a scorer and a backup point guard, rugged big man Kurt Thomas is healthy, and James Jones provides defense and perimeter shooting.

■ **Style.** The Spurs were able to take the Suns out of their quick-shot running game in the teams' last regular-season meeting (Phoenix scored 85 points, its second-lowest output this season), but on balance, the Suns forced their tempo on the other two West heavyweights this year. Phoenix averaged 108.6 points in seven games against the Spurs and Mavs. This will be the year the Suns' potent offense wins out. —S.D.

Yet Wade is willingly overlooking that history, dragging his bum shoulder into this mess, precisely because his presence gives the Heat a fighting chance to make history. During Wade's absence, the team played more intense defense and reconfigured the offense to focus on O'Neal, who averaged 19.4 points with Wade out. The Heat was 16-7 and allowed an average of only 90.5 points in the games Wade missed because of the shoulder injury.

Adding a high-scoring threat such as Wade to a mix in which O'Neal and the defense can dominate makes this version of the Heat one of the great NBA postseason mysteries ever. It's not hard to imagine Miami being bumped out of the playoffs in the first round. But it's also not hard to see Wade magically returning to form and carrying the Heat into June, as he did last year. As Bulls forward P.J. Brown says, "With Wade back, that is a team no one is going to want to play. They're a great unknown."



Expect the Mavs to see plenty of this from Stoudemire.

NBA PLAYOFFS PREVIEW

Wade seems to be enjoying his wildcard status. He slyly admits he likes to surprise folks. Even his return to action, on Easter, came out of nowhere. Wade was expected to join

the Heat later that week, but he says he woke up that morning and simply decided he felt like playing. As of that morning, no one in the Miami organization knew of Wade's plan. He called his agent, Henry Thomas, only hours before the game to tell him. "That's just how Dwyane works," Thomas says. "He likes to do things like that."

Wade's decision to return to the court at all is a surprise. His shoulder will require surgery to tighten the joint, and in the days after he suffered the injury a return this season seemed impossible. His shoulder, the thinking went, could be knocked out of joint again, and Wade could be risking his entire basketball future for one unlikely title run. But that thinking was plain wrong: Wade is not risking long-term damage. He decided against surgery after he was told by doctors that, though playing through the injury leaves him vulnerable to another dislocation, the shoulder can't get any worse. He is wearing the compression sleeve to keep the joint warm and loose.

Commissioner David Stern, pointing out that the league in no way influences the decisions its players make on injuries, says, "I'm gladly informed that he may injure himself but that it will not be a further injury and that he won't do any further damage. But as a fan and an observer, you are concerned about people who are playing in pain."

Thomas confirms Stern's information. "Even if it pops out again, it'll hurt like hell, but that's it," he says. "Trust me, he would not be out there if he was risking his career long term."

Even if Wade is not putting his career on the line, the torment of the injury (at the time of the dislocation, the shoulder hurt so badly that Wade was wheeled off the floor in Houston) must linger in his consciousness. Considering the kind of player Wade is—one who relies on sharp cuts to the basket to draw contact from defenses and set up pull-up jumpers—he cannot afford the cautiousness that such bad memories can induce. He shot 10.9 free throws per game in last year's postseason, and those trips to the line accounted for 9.1 percent of the Heat's scoring. That's why, in the handful of games Wade played at the end of the regular season, he practically begged opponents to knock him around. "I want them to go right at me and to see if I can do what I normally do," Wade told reporters. "That's what I need, especially now. I need teams to come at

me because that's what's going to happen in the playoffs."

No question there. In the playoffs, defenses will treat Wade like anyone else—and there has to be concern that a defender could take an unsportsmanlike swipe at the shoulder. Nets small forward Richard Jefferson says he doesn't expect Wade to get cheap shots, but ... "Put it this way: No one is going to feel bad for him."

"You're not going to go out and do anything dirty to him," Bulls point guard Chris Duhon says. "But you want to be as physical as you can with him, especially when he is penetrating. The injury is going to be on his mind, and the more you can have him thinking about it, the better. With the way he

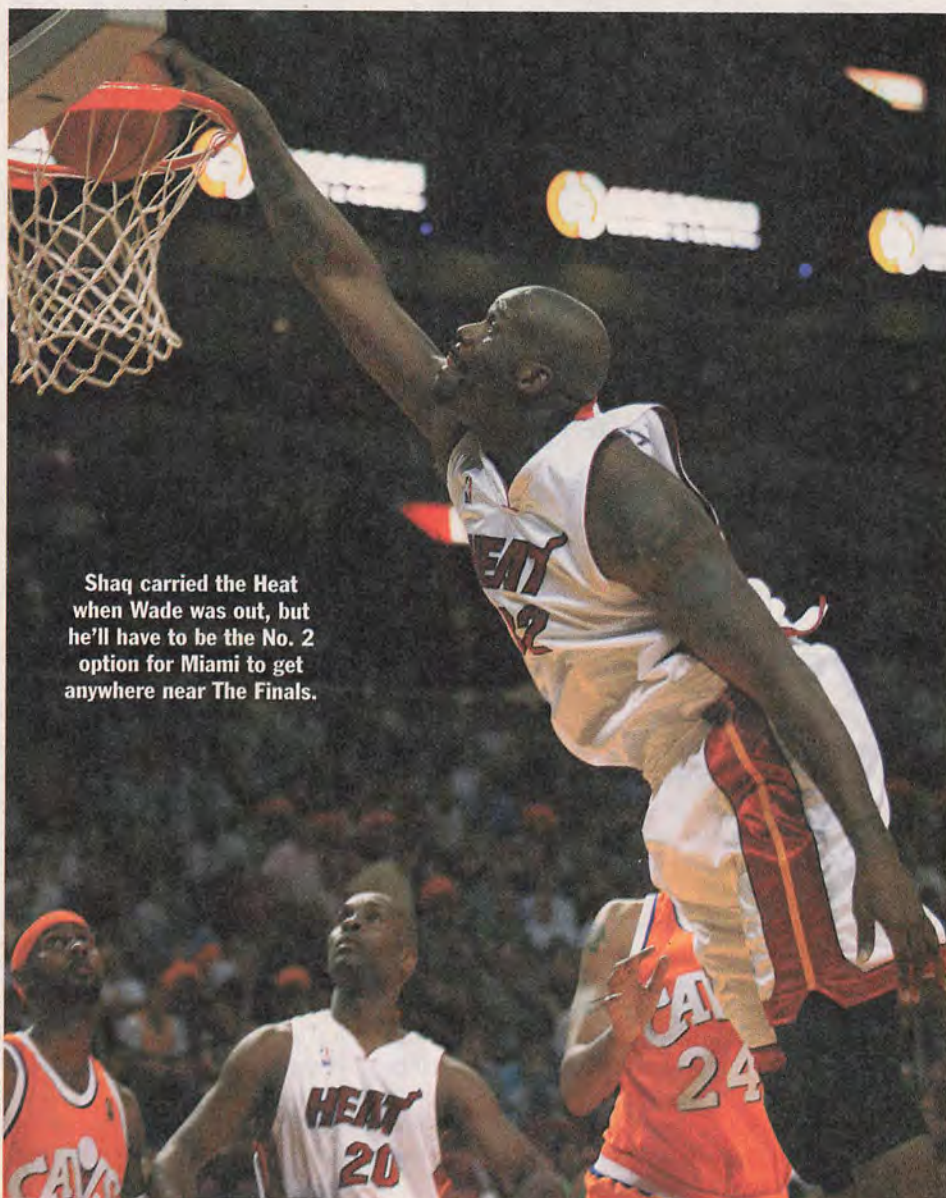
'You want to be as physical as you can with him, especially when he is penetrating. The injury is going to be on his mind, and the more you can have him thinking about it, the better.'

plays, you know he is going to get contact, anyway."

In the early going of Wade's return, at least, he was able to handle that contact. He averaged 16.3 points in his first four games back; he shot 44.4 percent and averaged 6.5 free throw attempts in limited minutes (and also averaged 5.0 turnovers). Wade hasn't shown that he is ready for what the Heat hopes will be a months-long playoff grind. After the Heat secured the Southeast Division crown with a win over the Wizards last week, Wade shrugged his much-discussed shoulder and said, "Of course our goal is higher. Our goal is to get to the championship and defend our title. This was something we expected coming in, but it was hard on us."

It wasn't just hard—it was historically hard. And of all the foes Wade and the Heat will face in the coming weeks, history might be the toughest to overcome.

SN



Shaq carried the Heat when Wade was out, but he'll have to be the No. 2 option for Miami to get anywhere near The Finals.

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Your cheat sheet for the playoffs

Names that matter

For the first time in four years, the top five scorers in the regular season are in the playoffs, though Gilbert Arenas (knee) will be there only in spirit. That means plenty of big games—and plenty of pet moves. An NBA scout breaks down the one thing that helps the best do their worst to opponents:

Kobe Bryant (31.5 ppg)

Crossover dribble into a jump shot. "I know everyone has crossovers, but he does it better than anybody else. He's quick, he has great range off it, and he's great along the baseline—as good as anyone in the game."

Carmelo Anthony (29.1 ppg)

Jab-fake, one dribble, then a pull-up jump shot. "He's got 3-point range, but he loves to put the ball on the floor and pull up, and he can go left or right. He's more selective with his shots now; that's why he's made himself a better player."



Gilbert Arenas (28.4 ppg)

3-point shot. "Arenas has the best range in the NBA; he makes it look so easy from 28 feet. There couldn't be a more disastrous injury to a playoff team."

Dwyane Wade (27.8 ppg)

Crossover dribble right, then hard left to the rim. "He's incredible with his body control—shots from behind his back, reverse layups, 360 moves. I don't know if I've ever seen anybody put the ball in the basket with the body contortions that he does."

LeBron James (27.5 ppg)

Quick first step. "Nobody has a more explosive first step than him; it gives him daylight and the ability to get up to the rim. He has 3-point range and a really nice pull-up jump shot, but he's at his best taking it to the rim."

Teams to watch

Bad seeds: Interesting thing about the top seeds in each conference: They don't get to The Finals very often. Since the Lakers and Pacers, two No. 1 seeds, met in the 2000 Finals, only three of the 12 Finals teams have been No. 1s. And only one, the 2002-03 Spurs, has won a championship. Meanwhile, a No. 2 seed has won the championship in four of the past six seasons. Maybe it's not so good to be the Mavericks and Pistons.

Rank 'em if you got 'em: In the playoffs, it's all about matchups. But just for fun, let's forget the pairings and simply rank the best teams.



Wouldn't you be scared if you saw Yao in the lane?

Matchups to love

Which NBA playoff matchup would users of SportingNews.com most like to see?

Best of the West
Suns vs. Mavericks

56%

Big Ben comes home
Bulls vs. Pistons

17%

D-Wade vs. LeBron
Heat vs. Cavaliers

15%

The rematch
Mavericks vs. Heat

8%

Shoot 'em up
Suns vs. Nuggets

4%



Numbers that count

.714

The Rockets' winning percentage (15-6) since Yao Ming returned from a broken leg March 5. If there is a team in the West that scares the Suns and Mavs, Houston is it. Rockets guard Tracy McGrady, who is 0-5 in playoff series, believes a still-improving Yao is his ticket out of the first round. "Everything is moving slower for him," McGrady says. "He knows how to use every advantage he has. He's 7-6—that's a pretty big advantage. That's the most important thing as far as us moving on."

1

Wins the Wizards have in nine games this season with only one of their three best players in the lineup. Washington will start the playoffs—and almost certainly finish them—with Gilbert Arenas and Caron Butler (hand) sidelined. The Wizards are 33-21 when Antawn Jamison, Arenas and Butler all start and 6-10 when two of them start.

14

Games the Heat's Shaquille O'Neal and Dwyane Wade had played together this season before Wade returned from a shoulder injury on April 8. Will these guys even recognize each other when they hit the floor in the first round?

Predictions to remember

Ben and now: When the Eastern Conference comes down to Chicago-Detroit, the Bulls will find it tough to swallow that stealing Ben Wallace from Detroit in the offseason couldn't get them to The Finals. The Pistons lost a four-time defensive player of the year and still reduced their opponents' shooting percentage from .452 (13th in the league) to .445 (sixth). In fact, just by looking at the numbers, it's hard to see the difference made by Wallace's absence in Detroit or his presence in Chicago. The Pistons have given up an average of 91.8 points, up from 90.2 last year, but that's mostly because Detroit's perimeter defense has been weaker—opponents' 34.0 percent shooting at the 3-point line is up from 32.5 percent. The Bulls have allowed 43.6 percent shooting overall, up from 42.6 percent last year.

Back up the firetruck: Three coaches who lost in the first round last year—Milwaukee's Terry Stotts, Memphis' Mike Fratello and Sacramento's Rick Adelman—are out of the league. Anyone who loses in the Eastern Conference's first round this year had better have an up-to-date resume.

A star is born: In every playoffs, there's a guy who goes from nonstar to budding All-Star. Last season, it was Mavericks forward Josh Howard; this year it'll be Bulls forward Luol Deng, 22. Deng, who leads the Bulls in, well, almost nothing, is second on the team in scoring (19.0 points per game) and rebounding (7.1) and is the guy whose slashing game is a steady source of offense when Ben Gordon and Kirk Hinrich go cold from the perimeter. When games get tight, the Bulls will lean on his 51.8 percent shooting—he does lead them in that—even more. "You are just starting to see how good Lu can be," says teammate P.J. Brown, a veteran of 71 playoff games. "He can score from the outside, but he is getting better and better at posting up and putting the ball on the floor. You forget how young he is because he is mature."

Contributing: Dan Graf, Sean Deveney, Ryan Fagan



Remember this face: You'll be seeing a lot of Deng.



Let the feast begin

NFL DRAFT

All times Eastern

▶ WHEN

Saturday, April 28 (noon)
Sunday, April 29 (11 a.m.)

▶ WHERE

Radio City Music Hall, New York

▶ ON TV

Live coverage on ESPN, ESPN2
and the NFL Network

▶ ON SPORTING

NEWS RADIO

Saturday, noon-7 p.m.
Sunday, 1-6 p.m.



⌘ Hors d'oeuvres ⌘

Hot Wings

Kevin Kolb — An enticing quarterback with a cannon arm
Market price

Cajun Poppers

LaRon Landry — A choice safety with a gratifying punch
Market price

Shrimp Cocktail

Troy Smith — A diminutive quarterback with a delightful winning taste
Market price

Sampler Platter

Ted Ginn — A wideout/return man with a little flavor of everything
Market price

Entrees

Bayou Special

JaMarcus Russell — A heavenly quarterback with a rich blend of arm strength, size and poise

Market price

Irish Stew

Brady Quinn — A seasoned passer with distinctive skills and a dash of sneaky athleticism

Market price

Catch of the Day

Calvin Johnson — An exquisite wide receiver with rare hands, massive size and a flair for the spectacular

Market price

Wisconsin Strip Steak

Joe Thomas — A 4,976-ounce prime cut of left tackle with tempting size and divine athleticism

Market price



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63 Chargers, Bears

64 Colts, Seahawks

The Raiders' quandary at No. 1: **the BEST PLAYER** (Johnson) or **the GREATEST NEED** (Russell)? *By Paul Attner*

It has been difficult to write much positive lately about Al Davis. But here's an attempt: He still recognizes that, if at all possible, you really should select the best available player on your draft board.

A cliché, yes, but there is truth within the bromide. Davis knows in his heart of football hearts that Georgia Tech wide receiver Calvin Johnson, not LSU quarterback JaMarcus Russell, should be the Raiders' choice as the No. 1 pick in this year's draft. Davis just needs to figure out how to clear up his horrid quarterback situation before the draft. If he can do that, then there's no question he will pounce on Johnson, easily the top player in this draft and one of the clearest "sure thing" prospects to come along in the last 10 years.

"He's a no-brainer, the cleanest, no flaws," says Dolphins general manager Randy Mueller. "Just because he is a receiver, I wouldn't be scared to take him that high because I don't think he will fail." That's the kind of praise you receive when you are 6-5, weigh 239, have game-breaking 4.35 speed and terrific hands and easily pass the character test.

Yet Russell still looms as the first choice because, even with a player of Johnson's ability available, you won't win without a good quarterback. "If you have a conviction on a quarterback and you have that need, you have to take him," says former Texans general manager Charley Casserly. "If the quarterback is among your top five guys, you can justify pushing him to No. 1."

Russell is one of those unpolished physical wonders who creates the most angst for scouts. He's really unlike anyone who has played the position in the NFL. He is athletic and huge—a sculpted 6-5½, 256—and can easily flick a pass 70 yards. His upside is enormous. But he has been out of shape during the offseason and his lower-body mechanics need work. There are questions about how quickly he will grasp a pro-style offense and whether his feet are nifty enough—he's not Vince Young—to avoid an overabundance of punishment. He could be a good player or a potential superstar, or he might be overwhelmed in the NFL. Too bad Johnson is not a quarterback.

SCOUTING the DRAFT

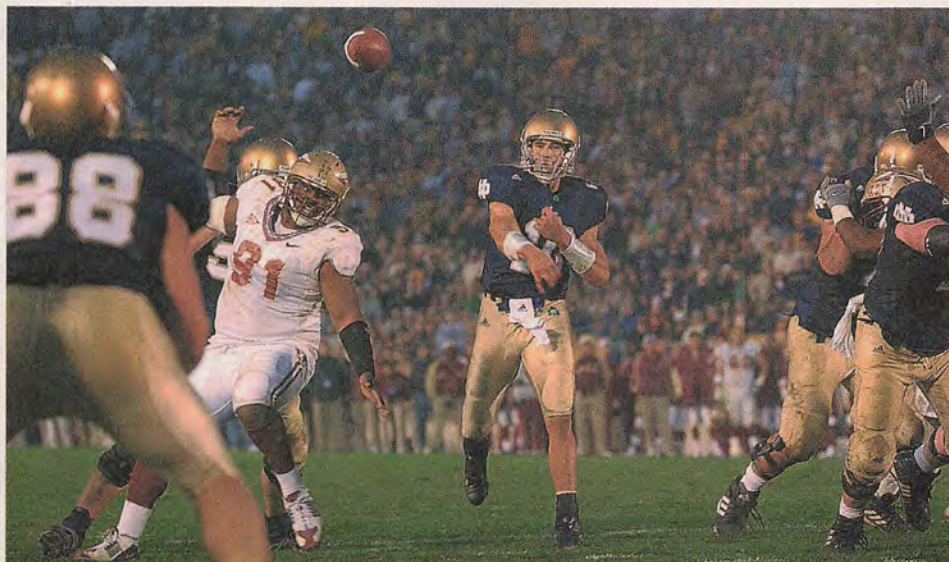
And what about **BRADY QUINN?**

Brady Quinn is this year's Matt Leinart. He'll probably come out of the draft process with the same view Leinart expressed last June. "These (scouts) look to drag you down," Leinart said with disgust. Quinn has gone through a similar dissection the past few months.

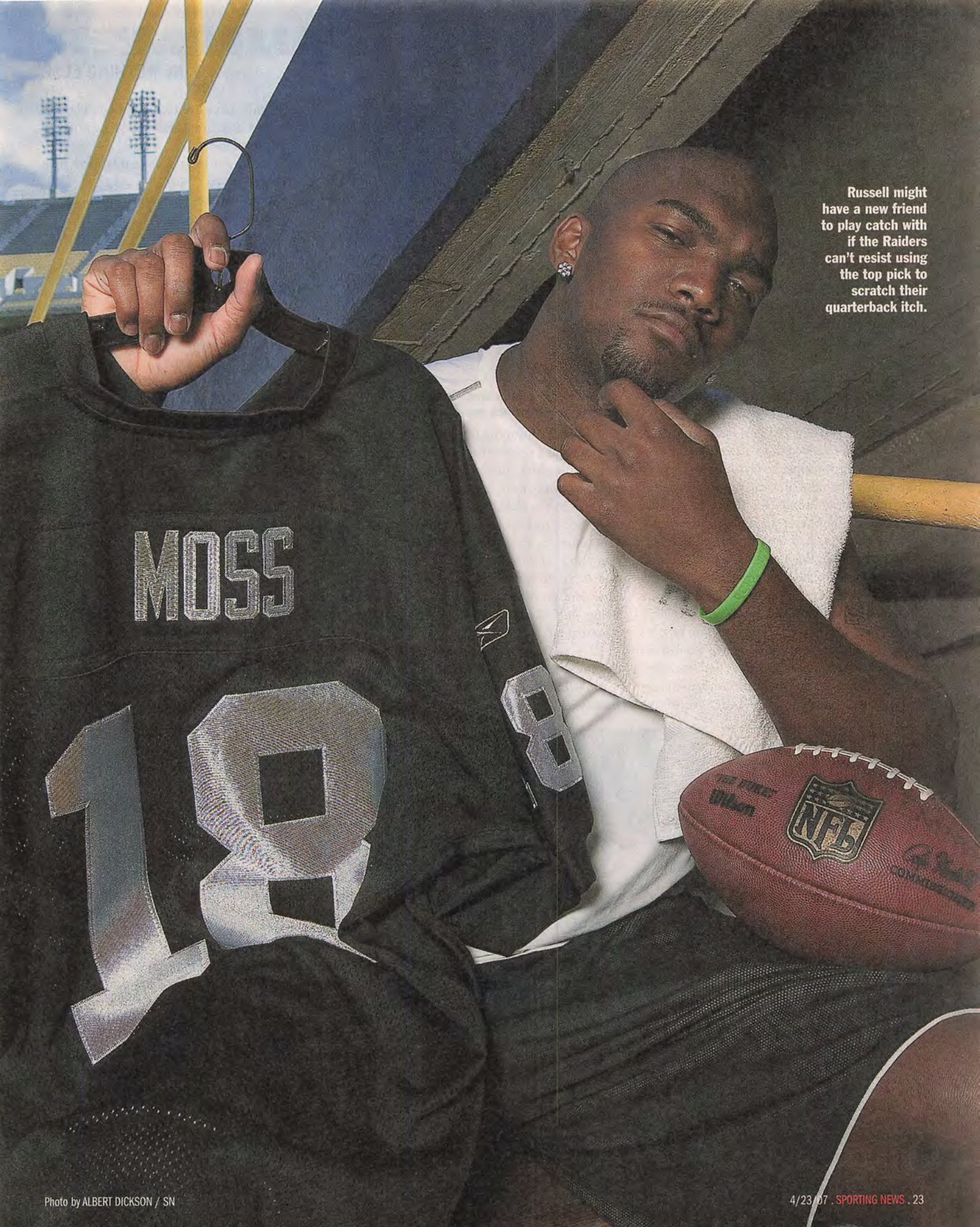
Unlike Russell, Quinn doesn't have much room for growth. So he doesn't excite anyone,

much like Leinart, who slipped to Arizona at No. 10 last April. "Quinn is a solid player and you know what you are getting, and there is something to be said for that," says Scot McCloughan, 49ers vice president of player personnel.

Quinn has been groomed for much of his life to play quarterback in the NFL. He comes from a complex offense at Notre Dame, he has impressive work habits, his mechanics are flawless, and he is tough. And NFL folks aren't as hung up as you might expect on the "Can he win big games?" question attached to his resume. But sometimes he is inexplicably inaccurate, and he'll have to prove he can make consistently good decisions under pressure. At best,



Quinn's growth spurt is pretty much over, so NFL teams know what they're getting with him.



Russell might have a new friend to play catch with if the Raiders can't resist using the top pick to scratch their quarterback itch.

he is a second-level pro quarterback, below the Peyton Mannings and Carson Palmers.

But the Bears got to a Super Bowl with Rex Grossman, much less talented than Quinn. One scout compares Quinn to Eli Manning coming out of college. Based on Eli's play so far, that might be one comparison Quinn would want to avoid.

Character better count

Commissioner Roger Goodell certainly has grabbed the attention of teams for this draft. Background checks on prospects are being ramped up, and it's a good bet that some players with character issues who might have been chosen fairly high in previous drafts either will not be picked or will slip to later rounds.

After all, the Titans inexplicably wasted a first-round choice in 2005 on Pacman Jones, who had been removed from many draft boards because of his multiple behavior issues. Jones was such a problem at West Virginia that its coaching staff told some NFL teams the school did not want him to return for his senior year. Chris Henry also had a bunch of red flags at West Virginia, yet the Bengals still took him in the third round of the same draft. Now, no club wants to be the next Tennessee or Cincinnati.

In discussions with NFL scouts and coaches, the first reason they give as grounds to take a prospect off the board is violence against a woman. Other major reasons cited include repeated drug violations more serious than using marijuana; a pattern of other problems



Because of the NFL's crackdown on off-field issues, Wright's stock could take a hit.

with the law, including DUIs and firearm possession; and a relatively new one, past involvement with gangs. Some teams also will downgrade or eliminate a player based on his immaturity or bad work habits.

"If he's a bad apple and you have him in the first round, he's just going to be a less expensive bad apple" if you draft him in a later round, Saints coach Sean Payton says. "But you still have a responsibility to the current roster to bring in that right person. Those guys are counting on that."

Here are five players whose draft status could be most affected by off-field issues:

■ UNLV cornerback Eric Wright (left USC because of drug issues).

■ Florida defensive tackle Marcus Thomas (failed two drug tests and was kicked off the team in November).

■ Syracuse cornerback Tanard Jackson (two positive drug tests).

■ Ole Miss outside linebacker Rory Johnson (immaturity, academic issues).

■ Texas cornerback Tarell Brown (two drug arrests in the past eight months).

This draft has wideouts aplenty

Even though there's just one Calvin Johnson in this draft, that doesn't mean your favorite team will be denied if it needs to grow stronger at receiver. There is an abundance of talent, which means a club could find a productive player as late as the fourth round.

"Calvin Johnson alone elevates the receiver group," says the 49ers' McCloughan. "But this is a really good bunch of guys, with a lot of potential. They all aren't the same as far as strengths and weaknesses, but there is a lot of athletic talent spread among them."

This depth is one reason some teams give for not wanting to move up to draft Johnson if Oakland fails to make him the first choice. Their thinking goes like this: Why give up draft picks and/or veteran players, even for someone as gifted as Johnson, if you have so many other quality receivers available?

"I could see six receivers drafted by the middle of the second round," John Dorsey, the

DRAFT DISH

By War Room scouts

Why are NFL scouts in love with Ole Miss LB **Patrick Willis**? Beyond the skills that make him the top inside linebacker in the draft, his willingness to do nearly every drill at his pro day, despite already having excelled at the Combine, won over a lot of hearts. He also can play outside 'backer, where he would rank second behind only Penn State's **Paul Posluszny**. ➤ A late-emerging sleeper is Oregon State QB **Matt Moore**, a highly recruited prep player who slipped off the radar after transferring from UCLA to Oregon State



Moore was overlooked in the predraft process, but he's a sleeper who could make some team look mighty smart.

(via a junior college). He did not get invited to any of the big all-star games or the Combine, but he has the talent and build to become a good starting NFL quarterback. Look for Moore to get drafted in the middle of Day 2. ➤ **Antwan Barnes** looms as Florida International's first-ever draft pick. Barnes knocked everyone's socks off at the Combine by showing he has the natural athleticism to be considered for a switch from defensive end, where he is undersized (6-0½, 240), to outside linebacker. He could go as early as near the end of Day 1 or early on Day 2, though either might be a reach. ➤ Teams are debating where Iowa's **Marshal Yanda** fits best. He lacks ideal height (6-3½) for a tackle and is a bit thin (305) for a guard, but he has the talent to start at either spot. Regardless, he figures to be drafted in the third round. ➤ Most teams view Missouri

Western's **Gijon Robinson** as a tight end/H-back prospect—probably a fourth- or fifth-rounder—because of his hands, athleticism and speed, but his height (6-0¾) could be a problem. A position switch to fullback could be in the offing if things don't work out at tight end.



Get the latest draft analysis and rankings by subscribing to Pro Football War Room at sportingnews.com.



PRESTON C. MACK FOR SN

Scads of receivers—Meachem included—will hear their names called in the first two rounds.

Packers' director of college scouting says. "If that happens, you might even see a bigger run on the position."

That means LSU's Dwayne Bowe, USC's Dwayne Jarrett, Tennessee's Robert Meachem, Ohio State's Ted Ginn and either Ohio State's Anthony Gonzalez or LSU's Craig Davis—or both—might not last until Round 3. That still leaves the possibility of some intriguing prospects on the board: South Carolina's Sidney Rice, Fresno State's Paul Williams and USC's Steve Smith, among others.

And the weakest position? Tight end, where Miami's Greg Olsen is a shaky first-rounder. Colleges are running so much spread offense these days that they simply don't need tight ends, even though that position has taken on more importance lately on the pro level.

Hits and misses

When Ron Wolf, the former Packers general manager, studied past drafts to find some common denominators that characterized successful picks, he could find only one that stood out. More than not, the best players attended schools in the major conferences. It was not a perfect standard, but when it came down to choosing between two players in drafts, he consistently went with the guy from the big-name university.

I asked other scouts what they thought was the one characteristic of successful players from the drafts in which they had participated. Almost unanimously, they came up with one answer: effort.

"You want a guy who wants to show up every day and work," says the Dolphins' Mueller. "Does he want to punch a clock every day? If a guy works hard enough, he doesn't have to be physically perfect. His desire can make up for a lot of sins."

"They have had a burning desire to succeed," says Casserly. "Now, you are not sure how that will be affected once he is in the NFL and his life changes. Sometimes money will make a difference in how they work. But I think a guy who really wants to be good has less chance of letting money change him."

And those common traits that have led to misses?

"You fall in love with what guys do at the Combine and other workouts," says the Packers' Dorsey. "Or you fall in love with a guy's personality. He dazzles you, but he still can't play."

Forgetting production also leads to bad picks. Players who consistently produced good statistics, even if they don't have all the measurables, prove more reliable than the physical specimen who has no football instincts. "Tape doesn't lie," says Wolf. "If the guy keeps making plays on tape, you sit up and take note."

Here are four risky first-round prospects in this draft:

■ Clemson defensive end Gaines Adams (could wind up being only a situational player because of problems against the run).

■ Jarrett (lack of speed

presents huge downside).

■ Olsen (lacks developed blocking skills).

■ Michigan defensive tackle Alan Branch (lack of consistency in games scares some scouts).

Where are the small-school players?

When the late Eddie Robinson had his best teams at Grambling, the NFL happily was finding gems at his and other so-called small schools. But what once was fertile ground for the pros has now dried up noticeably.

One NFL personnel man stared a few minutes at his preliminary board for this year's draft before finding any names of players from small schools. He finally identified two prospects he might pick, both in the late rounds. Other scouts say it's not quite that bad, but even they agree that predominantly black colleges and schools below Division I-AA no longer are developing as many top NFL players as they once did.

"It's dried up beyond dry," says Casserly. "We all have our theories as to why. But we met as a league 10 years ago about player development because we were concerned that as academic requirements rose in colleges, it would affect the talent coming into the NFL. And that is what is happening right now."

In addition, with more colleges recruiting nationally and with more Internet recruiting services increasing the scrutiny of prospects, it's now more unlikely that a really good high school player will escape big-school notice.

The best small-school player in this draft is Jacoby Jones, a receiver from Lane College, who's likely a fourth-round pick at best. Other small-school guys who could be drafted include Michael Allan, a tight end from Whitworth; Allen Barbre, a tackle from Missouri Southern; Kevin Boss, a tight end from Western Oregon; and Zak DeOssie, a linebacker from Brown.

SN



LANE COLLEGE

Jones has the hands and explosiveness to make the leap from Division II to the NFL.

S Join Bob Berger, Bob Stelton and Brian Baldinger for pick-by-pick draft coverage live from Radio City Music Hall on Sporting News Radio. Tune in for expert analysis and interviews with the top picks and other guests from noon-7 p.m. ET on Saturday, April 28, and 1-6 p.m. on Sunday. Listen online at sportingnewsradio.com or on XM Satellite Channel 144.



Big Value Board




Round and round we go: War Room scouts illuminate the absolute worth of every player worth drafting

ROUND	QB	RB/*FB	WR	TE	OT	G	C
1	JaMarcus Russell (1) Kevin Kolb (23)	Adrian Peterson (3)	Calvin Johnson (2) Ted Ginn (12)	Zach Miller (10) Greg Olsen (14)	Joe Thomas (13)	Justin Blalock (22)	
2		Antonio Pittman (34) Marshawn Lynch (36) Kenny Irons (37)	Dwayne Bowe (27) Aundrae Allison (35) Jason Hill (43) Sidney Rice (45)		Tony Ugoh (29) Levi Brown (42) Ryan Harris (47)		Josh Beekman (30)
3	John Beck (48) Brady Quinn (63) Matt Moore (95)	Chris Henry (49) Brandon Jackson (69) *Brian Leonard (70) Michael Bush (94)	Robert Meachem (50) Steve Smith (51) Craig Davis (64) Paul Williams (65) Anthony Gonzalez (67) Dwayne Jarrett (71) David Clowney (77) Jacoby Jones (79) James Jones (82) Laurent Robinson (89) Jemalle Cornelius (90)	Ben Patrick (76)	Joe Staley (74) Marshal Yanda (85) James Marten (86) Julius Wilson (93)	Arron Sears (53) Ben Grubbs (54)	Samson Satele (55) Ryan Kalil (58) Enoka Lucas (87)
4	Troy Smith (101) Drew Stanton (119) Toby Korrodi (120) Tyler Thigpen (122) Jeff Rowe (125)	Kenneth Darby (102) Lorenzo Booker (103) *Cory Anderson (118)	Derek Stanley (104) Johnnie Lee Higgins (111) Steve Breaston (112)	Matt Spaeth (121)	Daniel Parrish (113)		Lyle Sendlein (109)
5	Jordan Palmer (126) 	D. Wright (139), *L. McClain (140), T. Hunt (159), *J. Snelling (161), S. Hicks (162), K. Smith (164), D.D. Terry (177), A. Coleman (178), T. Moss (195), R. Taylor (196), *O. O'Neal (197), D. Ware (200), D. Wynn (201), A. Bradshaw (211), G. Wolfe (212)	J. Taylor (141), C. Stuckey (149), Y. Figurs (150), C. Taylor (165), D. Woods (173), B. Myles (174), R. McKnight (175), R. Moore (176), J. Broussard (198), M. Price (199), M. McDaniel (202), D. Williams (209), R. Robinson (210), O. Jones (215)	Martrez Milner (138) Gijon Robinson (163) Luke Smith-Anderson (181)	Adam Koets (127) Herbert Taylor (137) Gabe Hall (151) Mike Otto (182) Rob Austin (203) Jacob Bender (204) Charles Harris (214)	Brandon Frye (172) Mike Jones (179) Uche Nwaneri (180) Tala Esera (183) Scott Smith (205) Erik Robertson (213)	Mark Fenton (136)
6	Tyler Palko (220) Luke Getsy (223) Lester Ricard (230)	Darius Walker (216) Justin Vincent (217) Courtney Lewis (218) Gary Russell (219)	Marco Thomas (226) Joe Fernandez (227)		Jason Capizzi (228) Nello Faulk (229)	Mansfield Wrotto (224)	Brent Pousson (225)
7	Trent Edwards (231) Isaiah Stanback (266)	Corey White (240) Thomas Clayton (245) *Deon Anderson (257) *Roshon Vercher (258) Jackie Battle (317) Steve Baylark (319) *Jesse Allen (320) Germaine Race (324) Nate Ilaoa (325)	M. Walker (241), J. Filani (242), D. Baker (243), C. Davis (244), P. Thompson (265), J. Kent (306), J. Swain (307), J. Hicks (308), S. Newton (309), S. Steptoe (310), D. Ball (311), V. Marshall (312), E. Randolph (318), S. Shackelford (322), M. DePriest (323)	Jonny Harline (246) Tyler Ecker (259) Clark Harris (267) Zac Herold (277) Rodney Hannah (290)	Allen Barbre (234) Corey Hilliard (260) Elliott Vallejo (261) Doug Free (262) Aaron Brant (289) Chris Denman (298) Jonathan Palmer (303) Mario Henderson (327)	Andy Alleman (233) Kurt Quarterman (256) Brian Daniels (268) Manuel Ramirez (269) Rueben Riley (291) Derrick Markray (299) Nevin McCaskill (304)	Scott Stephenson (232) Leroy Harris (255) Kyle Young (288)

News flash: The world isn't perfect. An NFL draft round may consist of 32 selections, but that doesn't mean there are exactly 32 guys worthy of being chosen in that round. Sometimes there are fewer (only 23 players *really* merit the first round this year), and sometimes there are more (90 deserve to be taken in the fifth round, which will consist of 37 players because of the addition of compensatory picks). If the world were perfect, prospects wouldn't climb draft

boards because they filled some team's specific need—or slide because it was a rich year at a particular position—and all you draftniks (and NFL executives, for that matter) would need on draft day would be this Big Value Board.

The board shows precisely where War Room scouts believe each prospect in the 2007 draft should be taken—based solely on his ability and the value of his position. (Each player's overall ranking, regardless of position, is in parentheses.)

DE	DT	OLB	ILB	CB	S	K/P
Gaines Adams (4) Jamaal Anderson (15) Charles Johnson (19)	Amobi Okoye (7) DeMarcus Tyler (20)	Paul Posluszny (6) Lawrence Timmons (21)	Patrick Willis (11)	Leon Hall (8) Tanard Jackson (17) Darrelle Revis (18)	LaRon Landry (5) Reggie Nelson (9) Brandon Meriweather (16)	 BOB LEVERONE / SN
Jarvis Moss (24) Adam Carriker (31)	Alan Branch (44) Marcus Thomas (46)	Jon Beason (26)	Justin Durant (25) David Harris (38)  JAY DROWNS / SN	Aaron Ross (28) Marcus McCauley (32) Daymeion Hughes (39) Eric Wright (40) Chris Houston (41)	Aaron Rouse (33)	
Ikaika Alama-Francis (52) Ray McDonald (56) LaMarr Woodley (57) Anthony Spencer (59) Victor Abiamiri (60) Baraka Atkins (66) Dan Bazuin (78) Quentin Moses (84)	Paul Soliai (72) Justin Harrell (73)	Stewart Bradley (61) Rufus Alexander (62) Juwan Simpson (80)		Josh Wilson (75) Tony Franklin (81) David Irons (83) Tarell Brown (92) DeAndre Jackson (96)	Eric Weddle (68) Kevin Payne (88) John Wendling (91)	
	Brandon Mebane (105) Matt Toeaina (115)	Stephen Nicholas (100)	Zak DeOssie (114) H.B. Blades (124)	Jonathan Wade (98) Michael Coe (99) Travarous Bain (116)	Michael Griffin (97) Dashon Goldson (106) Josh Gattis (107) Melvin Bullitt (108)	P Daniel Sepulveda (110) K Mason Crosby (117) P Adam Podlesh (123) V
Jay Moore (128) Brian Robison (142) Jermaine McElveen (171) Tim Crowder (185) Marques Gunn (206)	Clifton Ryan (129) Keith Jackson (135) Trey Lewis (143) Ola Dagunduro (156) Ryan McBean (157) Jeremy Clark (158) Turk McBride (166) Louis Leonard (184) Kareem Brown (194) Derek Landri (207)	Earl Everett (130) Rory Johnson (134) Clint Session (155) Sam Olajubutu (189)	Buster Davis (131) Zach Latimer (153) Quinton Culbertson (154) Michael Okwo (168) Anthony Waters (186) Quincy Black (188) Brandon Siler (192) Tony Taylor (193) Justin Warren (208)	Derrick Roberson (132) Marcus Hamilton (133) Anthony Arline (148) Ryan Smith (152) Corey Graham (160) Chaz Williams (167) Calvin Bannister (169) Tim Mixon (170) Montavious Pitts (190) C.J. Wilson (191)	Brannon Condren (144) Brandon McDonald (145) Craig Dahl (146) Gerald Alexander (147) Marvin White (187)	 BOB LEVERONE / SN
		Brian Crum (221)		John Talley (222)		
Jason Trusnik (247) Antwan Applewhite (254) Larry Birdine (263) Noland Burchette (278) C.J. Ah You (279)	Antonio Johnson (238) DeJuan Robinson (264) Shelton Bynum (275) Kelly Talavou (276) David Patterson (287) Brent Curvey (296) Barry Cryer (297) Jay Alford (300) Joe Cohen (314)	Dallas Sartz (236) Nate Harris (270) Antwan Barnes (271) Zach Catanese (285) Chad Nkang (286) KaMichael Hall (301) Mickey Pimentel (305)	Dedrick Harrington (239) Jon Abbate (252) Desmond Bishop (253) Jarvis Jackson (302)	C.J. Gaddis (237) Kenny Scott (248) Fred Bennett (249) John Bowie (272) Ramzee Robinson (282) Marquice Cole (283) A.J. Davis (284) Daniel Francis (295)	Michael Johnson (235) Sabby Piscitelli (250) Daren Stone (251) Marcus Paschal (273) Jeremy Burnett (274) J.J. Billingsley (280) Patrick Ghee (281) Jesse Daniels (293) C.J. Wallace (294) Tra Battle (313) Ryan Glasper (315) Willis Barringer (316)	K Justin Medlock (292) P Gordon Ely-Kelso (321) K Nick Folk (326)

Draft? It's a breeze

A quick scan of the players and teams that will be movin' and shakin'—or stallin' and sinkin'—on draft day. (Of course, with Matt Millen in the mix, who the heck really knows?) *By War Room scouts*

Of course, you'll be all over your favorite team's draft picks, but it's a long time between rounds. There are a number of teams worth watching as they decide how to use key draft spots or exercise new draft philosophies.

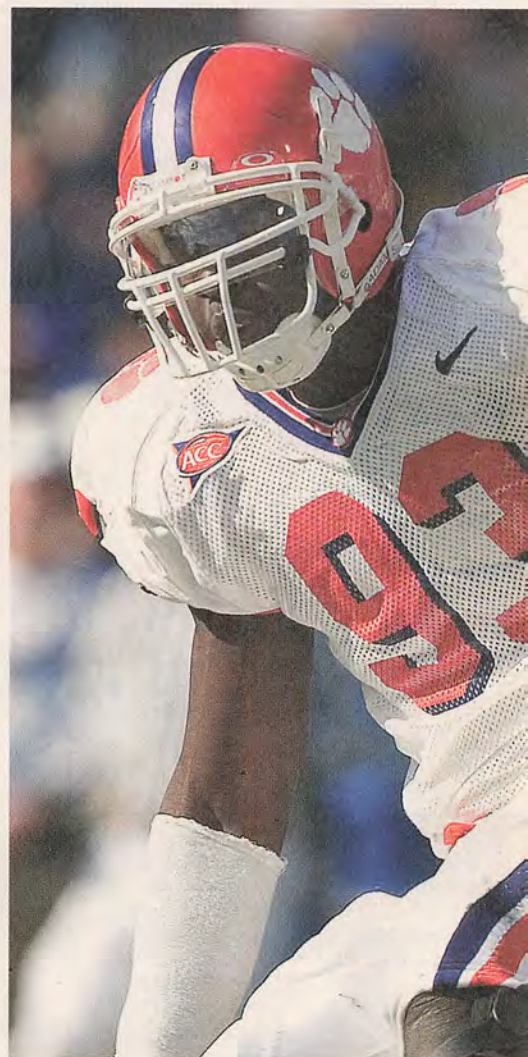
Detroit. The Lions need bodies, and at No. 2 they are in a great spot to trade down and still get the defensive player they want most, Clemson end Gaines Adams. If they stay put, Georgia Tech wide receiver Calvin Johnson is a logical fit—never mind the team's past failures drafting top wideouts. On the other hand, Mike Martz's offense doesn't really require superstar receivers to succeed. All of which makes the second pick in the draft quite intriguing.

Cleveland. Multiple options here. The Browns probably don't have the ammo to do it, but they could trade up for LSU quarterback JaMarcus Russell. Barring that, the organization is divided: Oklahoma running back Adrian Peterson or Wisconsin offensive tackle Joe Thomas or Notre Dame quarterback Brady Quinn? If all three players were on the board at No. 3, the Browns would be open to trading down as many as three spots to take one of them and gain extra picks. Possible suitors are Arizona (if Adams were available) or Tampa Bay (Adams or Johnson).

Dallas. The Cowboys will still play a 3-4 defense under new coach Wade Phillips, but they will be seeking different types of players for it. The Bill Parcells 3-4 focused primarily on stopping the run and creating a wall of big defenders with the front seven. Phillips' defense will use a more aggressive, slash-and-penetrate style that relies on speed and explosiveness more than size and power.

Atlanta. With new coach Bobby Petrino's switch from a zone-blocking scheme to a more power-oriented offense, look for the Falcons to bring in big, strong, physical linemen to replace some of their undersized blockers. And don't be surprised if Petrino takes a gamble on Michael Bush, his running back at Louisville, in the third round. Bush, who missed most of last season with a broken leg, would give Atlanta a bruising back to complement Warrick Dunn and Jerious Norwood.

Cincinnati. After a number of gambles on players with character issues blew up in their faces, the Bengals figure to avoid them at all costs. That means they won't pick players such as Florida defensive tackle Marcus Thomas, Texas cornerback Tarell Brown or UNLV cornerback Eric Wright.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The key question for these players is the position at which they'll fit best in the NFL. **< Adam Carriker, DE, Nebraska.** Carriker's value changes greatly depending on the type of defense the drafting team uses. He is viewed as a can't-miss defensive end prospect for teams that play the 3-4 but only a solid end prospect for a 4-3 defense. However, he is a very good tackle prospect for a 4-3 team.

Ray McDonald, DE, Florida. McDonald is an end/tackle 'tweener. He could be a solid starting strongside end, but if he could bulk up to about 295 pounds he would fare much better as a tackle.

> John Wendling, CB, Wyoming. Wendling mostly played safety at Wyoming, but he is not as consistently physical in run support as NFL teams would like. He has the size and physical ability to make the switch to cornerback.

Dwayne Wright, RB, Fresno State. Wright is a big power back who was productive in college, but he lacks explosiveness and top-end speed. Many teams think he will have to switch to fullback.



DOUGLAS C. FIZAC / AP

You can almost hear their wallets getting fatter

These players are loving their soaring draft stock.

Chris Houston, CB, Arkansas. A great Combine vaulted Houston, who was inconsistent in pass coverage at Arkansas, from a third-round prospect to a late-first/early-second-round prospect.

Joe Staley, OT, Central Michigan. Staley, initially a third- or fourth-round prospect, showed his natural athleticism during a great on-campus workout. Look for him to go in the second half of the second round.

Michael Griffin, S, Texas. Griffin saw his stock fall from the first round to the middle rounds during the season, but he has worked out and interviewed so well he has shot back up draft boards. He won't last beyond the second round.

> Brian Robison, DE, Texas. Robison is a tough, highly competitive player who performed like a fifth- or sixth-round prospect at Texas, but an outstanding Combine grabbed everyone's attention—his performance even evoked comparisons to Colts end Dwight Freeney. Some team will take Robison on Day 1.

The Lions need a jolt on defense, and they would love to plug in Adams.



BOB LEVERONE / SN



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Don't be spending those Benjamins quite yet

These players' draft stock has dived in recent weeks.

Alan Branch, DT, Michigan. Concerns about his conditioning and effort in postseason workouts have caused Branch to slide down draft boards, possibly well out of the top 10.

Daymeion Hughes, CB, California. Once viewed as one of the most productive cornerbacks in the country, Hughes has slipped to a second- or third-round projection after an average week at the Senior Bowl and a poor showing at the Combine.

< Clark Harris, TE, Rutgers. Regarded as one of the top tight ends in the country entering last season, Harris showed a lack of explosiveness, speed, size and strength as a senior. He figures to go late on Day 2.

Gary Russell, RB, Minnesota. After sitting out last season because of academics, Russell came out early. His 2005 game film revealed a fourth- or fifth-round prospect, but he showed up at the Combine way out of shape, ran a terrible 40 and did not look athletic or quick in drills. He might not be drafted.



PAUL NISELY / SN

A few bold draft-day predictions

■ Stanford quarterback Trent Edwards will get drafted no later than Round 2 despite not winning a single start as a senior. He is the prime example of a player who looks the part but does not play up to his ability consistently.

■ USC wide receiver Steve Smith will be drafted ahead of his overrated teammate, Dwayne Jarrett.

■ Quarterback Chris Leak, who led Florida to the national championship, will be chosen no higher than the sixth round—and might not get drafted. He is not a polished passer, has bad throwing mechanics, is under 6-0 and did not have a good Wonderlic showing.

■ Despite failing drug tests and being kicked off the team at Florida, Marcus Thomas will get selected on Day 1. That's what happens when you're the most talented defensive tackle in the draft.



JAY DROWNS / SN

Leak



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

We suspect Jarrett (left) won't be in the mood to exchange chest bumps if Smith comes off the board first.

QB

POSITION
STRENGTH **C+**

All player reports by
War Room scouts

FIRST ROUND

1 JaMarcus Russell*

LSU, 6-5½, 256, 4.68†

Has the strongest arm in football. Makes every throw and fits passes into tight spots. Gets rid of the ball quickly but isn't always accurate because of inconsistent mechanics. Sees the whole field well and excels at surveying options while scrambling. Powerful enough to break tackles. Showed great maturation last season after being inconsistent early in his career. Has the potential to be a top-flight starter for many years.

2 Brady Quinn

Notre Dame, 6-3¾, 232, 4.73

Has great technique, with a quick, compact delivery. Accurate within 10 yards and gets the ball to receivers in good spots consistently. Lacks the big arm to make intermediate-to-deep throws with zip and accuracy. Adept at going through progressions and finding open receivers. Moves well enough in the pocket to avoid sacks. A smart player who likely will start early on but could struggle to succeed long term.

THIRD ROUND

3 ▲ John Beck

BYU, 6-2, 216, 4.76

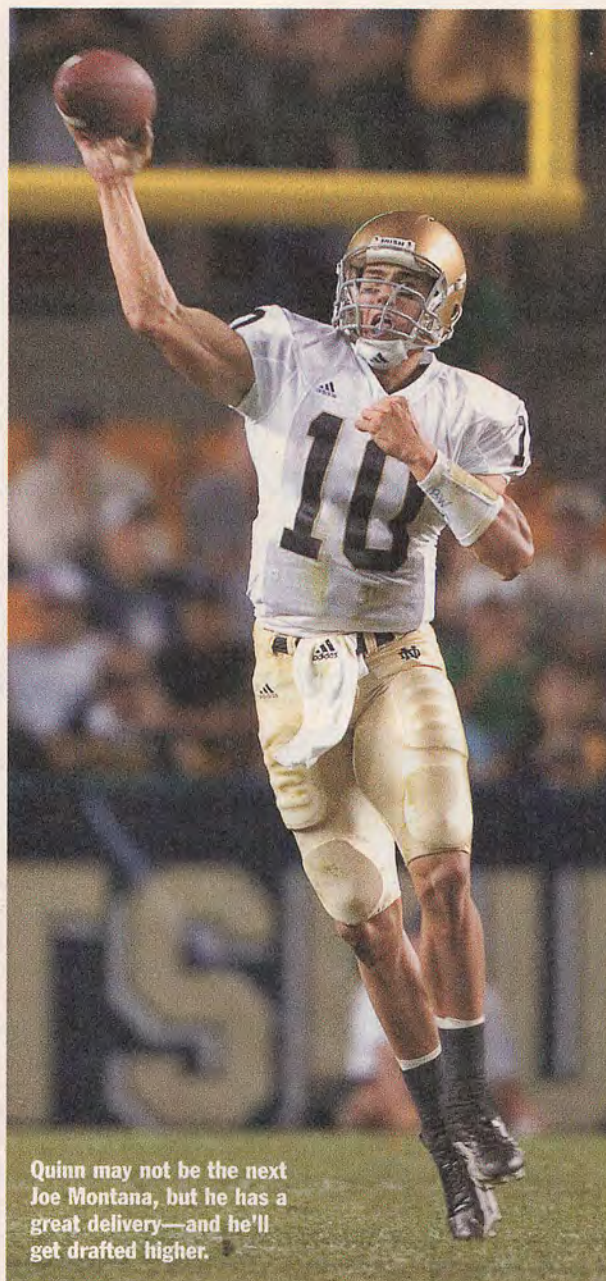
Smart, and reads defenses well. Shows a quick release and good footwork, but his sidearm delivery limits the zip on his passes. Has good timing and accuracy on short and intermediate throws. Lacks ideal height and has a lot of passes batted down or tipped. Lack of arm strength will make it hard for him to be more than a reserve.

SLEEPER

Matt Moore. With a stellar senior season, he put himself in the mid-round mix. Moore has the physical skills to become a good NFL starter in a couple of years.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6. Drew Stanton Michigan State | Has excellent ability but needs to improve his technique and accuracy to become a good NFL QB. |
| 7. ▼ Troy Smith Ohio State | Short (6-1), but has a knack for making plays. Could have a career similar to journeyman Jeff Blake's. |
| 8. ▲ Tyler Thigpen Coastal Carolina | Project player needs to revamp his footwork but has great intangibles and arm strength. |
| 9. Matt Moore Oregon State | Tough leader with a strong arm but needs to improve his footwork and technique. |
| 10. Jordan Palmer UTEP | Wildly inconsistent; has great athleticism but might lack the mental discipline to produce in the NFL. |
| 11. Jeff Rowe Nevada | Smooth playmaker who must improve his release and arm strength to become more than a backup. |
| 12. Toby Korrodi Central Missouri | Raw prospect will need time to develop but throws the deep ball accurately and has the talent to start. |



Quinn may not be the next Joe Montana, but he has a great delivery—and he'll get drafted higher.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

4 ▲ Trent Edwards

Stanford, 6-4½, 231, 4.82

Reads coverages correctly to find the open receiver. Has a quick release. Accurate on three-

SNAPSHOT

with **Brady Quinn**

My college stats fail to say:

How mentally prepared I am. There are no details I don't go over, and I always work hard studying my game and my opponent.

The NFL player I am most like is: I do some of the same things Tom Brady does: move around in the pocket, throw on the run. I also feel I'm a little like Joe Montana. I'm not saying I'm as good as those two, but I feel I have some of those traits.

I'm better than most players at my position because: I think my work ethic sets me apart. I'm always in the film room or the weight room. I like to lead by example.

My friends would describe my personality as: Some friends think I'm a meathead because I like to work out so much. But I can be a goofball and kick back.

step drops and when throwing on the move. Lacks good footwork and throwing mechanics. Has a bad habit of forcing passes into tight spots when no one is open. Lacks the accuracy to be a starter.

5 Kevin Kolb
Houston, 6-3½, 218, 4.87
Makes all the throws with accuracy and puts great zip on downfield passes. Sees the field well. Buys time in the pocket and makes plays with his feet.

Carried Houston's offense and showed improved decision making as a senior. Must adjust to a more traditional pro-style offense but could become a great starter.



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RB

POSITION
STRENGTH **A-**

Peterson has his flaws, but his power game makes them easier to accept.



FIRST ROUND

1 Adrian Peterson*
Oklahoma, 6-1½, 217, 4.40†

Runs aggressively with the strength and power to break tackles and gain yards after contact. Consistently makes big plays. Upright running style makes him susceptible to a lot of hard hits. A pass-blocking liability. Didn't catch many passes in college. Durability is a major question. Big, thick-bodied back who has the strength to be a dominant inside runner when he maintains a good pad level.

2 Marshawn Lynch*
California, 5-11½, 215, 4.48

Physical runner who can break arm tackles, absorb hard hits and keep going. Has the quickness, agility and burst to bounce runs outside. Lacks initial breakaway speed and explosiveness. Must improve at lowering his shoulders and running with a good pad level. As a receiver, must improve route-running skills and hands. Can become an elite player if he refines his receiving and blocking skills.

SECOND ROUND

3 Antonio Pittman*
Ohio State, 5-10¾, 210, 4.41

Has the strength to absorb hard hits and the balance to run through arm tackles. Surprisingly productive between the tackles. Shows a deceptive burst to the corner and bounces runs outside. Blocking technique is raw. Has good hands and is dangerous after the catch. Projects as a fine all-around player once he bulks up and improves as a pass blocker.

4 ▲ Chris Henry*
Arizona, 5-11¼, 230, 4.40

Has the size and strength to dominate. Absorbs hard hits and keeps going. Has the quick footwork needed to make sharp cuts and bounce runs outside. Shows a surprising burst through the hole. Raw, undisciplined runner who doesn't play with aggressiveness and intensity every snap. Teams must be careful not to overrate his athletic ability and overlook his lack of production.

THIRD ROUND

5 Brian Leonard (FB)
Rutgers, 6-1½, 226, 4.55

Runs through arm tackles. Can take hard hits and stay on his feet. Never will be a dominant lead blocker but probably will be good enough

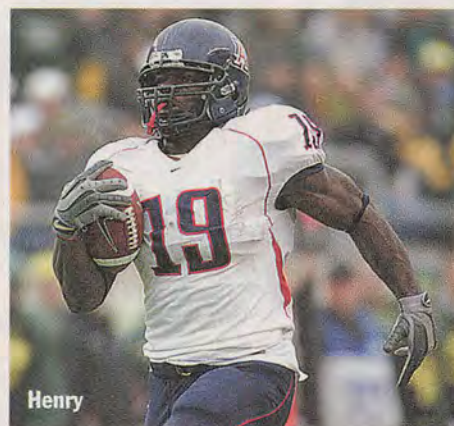
SNAPSHOT

with **Chris Henry**

How it felt to run well at the Combine: It felt good because people were saying, "There's no way he can be 230 pounds and run that fast." I know I left a lot of people with a stupid look on their face.

My personal philosophy is: I'm more of a live-in-the-moment kind of guy. If you start thinking about your future, you waste your present.

I'm better than most running backs because: The things in my favor are that I run as fast as the little guys, I hit as hard as the big guys and I make really good reads. I love running inside.



Henry

RICK BOWMER / AP

to start at fullback. Shows good toughness, strength, athleticism and competitiveness. Has better hands and receiving skills than most NFL running backs. Displays many rare abilities and could play running back, fullback, H-back or, at times, wide receiver.

6 Brandon Jackson*
Nebraska, 5-9¾, 206, 4.41

Athletic runner who sees the field well and shows the patience to wait for blocks and make quick cuts. Lacks the explosiveness to produce long touchdown runs. Must secure the ball better in traffic and improve his pass blocking. Shows good hands as a receiver and adjusts nicely to off-target passes. Can become a punishing runner if he lowers his shoulders more frequently.

7 Kenny Irons
Auburn, 5-10¾, 203, 4.47

Accelerates to full speed in a blink. Has the agility to make tacklers miss. Runs hard and keeps his feet moving to get through arm tackles. As a receiver, shows good hands and is dangerous after the catch. Has the talent to be a top back, but the question is whether he has the drive, commitment and durability.

8 Cory Anderson (FB)
Tennessee, 6-2½, 242, 4.66

Has great size and good speed but runs upright. Could become an excellent isolation blocker. Shows good hands as a receiver and makes would-be tacklers miss after the catch. Has the necessary physical skills but will fail to meet his potential if he doesn't improve his technique and consistency.

SLEEPER

Kolby Smith. He replaced the injured Michael Bush as Louisville's main ballcarrier in '06. He's a tough back who has the athleticism and running style of many NFL starters.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

11. Dwayne Wright* Fresno State

12. ▲ Lorenzo Booker Florida State

13. Le'Ron McClain (FB) Alabama

14. Kolby Smith Louisville

15. ▲ Jackie Battle Houston

16. ▼ Tony Hunt Penn State

17. Tyrone Moss Miami

18. Ahmad Bradshaw* Marshall

19. Danny Ware* Georgia

20. Garrett Wolfe Northern Illinois

21. Jason Snelling (FB) Virginia

22. Deon Anderson (FB) Connecticut

23. Darius Walker* Notre Dame

24. D.D. Terry Sam Houston State

25. Gary Russell* Minnesota

26. Ramonce Taylor* Texas College

Lacks explosiveness and speed but would be an intriguing prospect for a power running team.

Fast, elusive and valuable as a receiver. An ideal third-down back who's a TD threat on every touch.

Has the skills to become a versatile player who could be a lead blocker, short-yardage back and receiver.

Lacks big-play speed but could be a solid backup—if he doesn't develop into a starter.

Doesn't fit into any specific mold but could be a versatile backup at tailback, fullback or even H-back.

Has the physical tools and is talented enough to be an adequate starter but lacks aggressiveness.

Won't be a starter unless he improves his work ethic and becomes tougher and more aggressive.

Could make it as a change-of-pace, third-down back, but his lack of aggressiveness is a concern.

He's a tough, aggressive runner in the open field but lacks elusiveness and breakaway speed.

Despite his size (5-7½, 183), could make a roster as a backup and third-down option.

A better athlete than most fullbacks, he could be a productive inside runner in a one-back system.

Won't make a big impact as a rusher but could start for a team that needs a true lead blocker.

Lacks the speed and burst to start but has the skills (hands and agility) to be a third-down back.

Projects as a backup who could start if he learns to run with better body lean and adds some bulk.

Has the quickness and instincts to be a part-time, grind-it-out back but must be tough and durable.

A fine athlete who will need seasoning on the practice squad—and maybe in NFL Europe—to make a roster.

9▼ Michael Bush
Louisville, 6-1¾, 243, 4.66

Big, strong runner who keeps his feet moving after absorbing hard hits. Breaks tackles. Surprisingly quick and agile. Lacks the burst and speed to be a big-play threat. Shows great hands, makes tough catches and is solid in pass protection. Missed most of '06 season with broken leg. Can be a good starter if healthy.

10 Kenneth Darby
Alabama, 5-10¾, 211, 4.61

Smart, instinctive runner who consistently finds holes. Shows great quickness and the agility to freeze defenders and elude tacklers. Lacks break-away speed. If he becomes more consistent picking up his feet in traffic and lowering his shoulders, he will become a special back who makes big plays as a runner and receiver.

WR

POSITION
STRENGTH **A-**

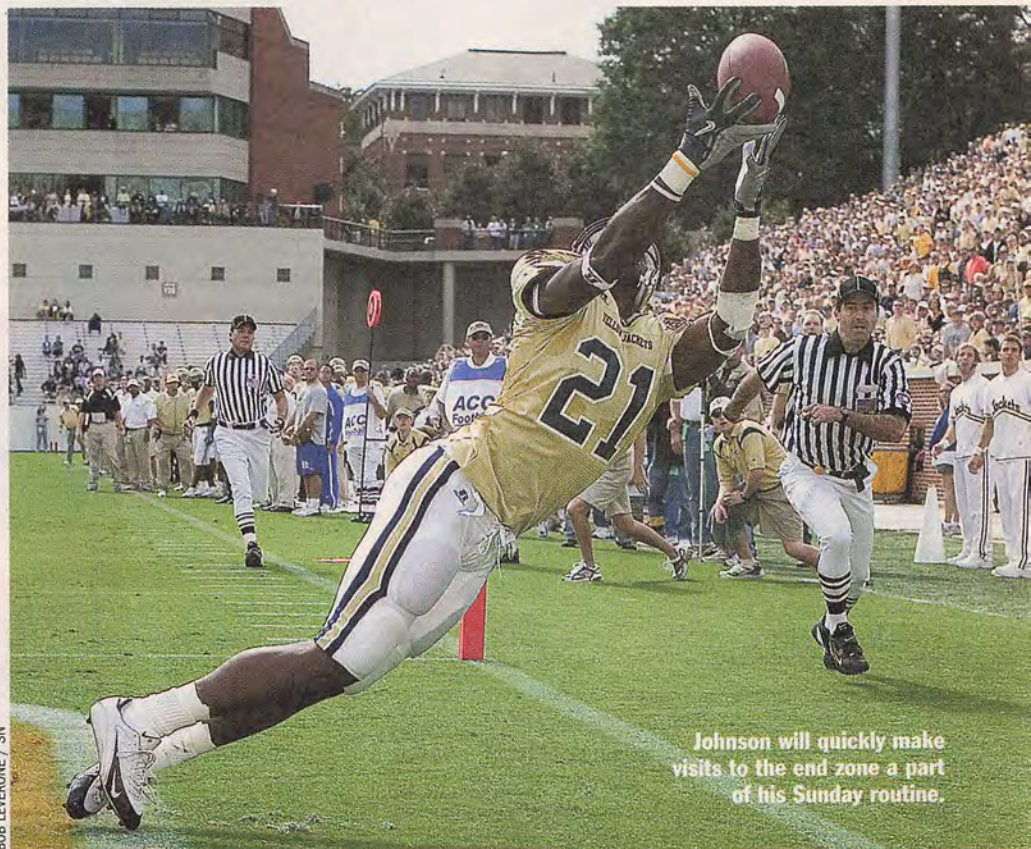
FIRST ROUND

1 Calvin Johnson*
Georgia Tech, 6-5, 239, 4.35+

Has outstanding hands and catches passes away from his body. Runs sharp, precise routes. Lacks the elite explosiveness to separate but still manages to gain a step on deep routes. Knows how to set up defenders. Fights through jams with surprising ease. Must work harder as a blocker. Will make an instant impact in the NFL and has the size, strength and hands to dominate.

2▲ Ted Ginn*
Ohio State, 5-11¼, 178, 4.30

Terrific hands but must learn to secure the ball. Drops too many passes and muffs too many punts. Runs undisciplined routes but gains separation with impressive explosiveness out of his



Johnson will quickly make visits to the end zone a part of his Sunday routine.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

>> Ted Ginn shares the NCAA record for career punt and kickoff returns for TDs (8). >>

cuts. Reaches full speed almost instantly off the line when he avoids jams. Has game-changing talent but must improve his skills to become an elite receiver.

3 Dwayne Bowe

LSU, 6-2½, 221, 4.40

Runs good routes, with a burst that creates consistent separation. Tough over the middle but also can be dangerous on deep routes. Excels on jump balls. Allows too many balls to reach his body and drop. Should be better at breaking tackles. Could be a productive possession receiver and dominate in the red zone.

4 Aundrae Allison

East Carolina, 6-0½, 198, 4.39

Will catch nearly everything thrown his way but needs to keep balls away from his body. Does not explode off the snap but gets into his routes and reaches top speed quickly. Elusive runner after the catch. Faster than he appears and rarely gets chased down. Could develop into a good No. 2 receiver who stretches the field.



Defenders occasionally catch up with Allison—but not very often.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

holes and turn short passes into long touchdowns. Won't be the focus of an NFL offense, which could lead to locker room problems because he's a me-first type of player.

9 Jason Hill

Washington State, 6-0½, 204, 4.36

Has great hand-eye coordination and body control on jump balls and along the sideline. Consistently finds open spots in zones. Loses focus too often and runs sloppy routes. Lacks the speed to gain separation against NFL corners. Not an intense blocker. Has the size, strength and hands to become a solid possession receiver.

10 Anthony Gonzalez*

Ohio State, 6-0, 195, 4.44

At his best adjusting to and catching off-target throws. Runs sharp, precise short patterns but must improve his downfield routes. Jams and physical coverage give

him trouble. Fast enough to outrun defenders who have the angle on him. Potential outweighs some long-term durability concerns. Will work hard and develop into a good starter.

SECOND ROUND

5 Robert Meachem*

Tennessee, 6-2, 217, 4.39

Has good size and speed, with an explosive burst off the line. Displays good hands when he maintains concentration. Catches passes in stride, which leads to big plays. Makes tacklers miss in the open field. Must improve his focus in running routes. Drops easy throws when he doesn't concentrate. Needs to be tougher, especially over the middle; drops too many passes when he senses defenders are approaching.

6 ▲ Steve Smith

USC, 5-11¾, 197, 4.44

Smooth, precise route runner with the quickness to change directions in a blink. Tough enough to make catches in traffic and smart enough to find openings in zones. Not a big-play threat or strong enough to gain yards consistently after contact. Ideally suited for a No. 3 role in the slot.

7 Sidney Rice*

South Carolina, 6-3½, 197, 4.51

Wins jump balls with his leaping ability, good hands and athleticism. Tends to round off routes or slow significantly in and out of cuts. Not elusive or aggressive. Lacks an explosive first step but reaches full speed quickly. Raw, but has the physical skills to make an immediate impact as a deep threat and along the sidelines.

8 ▼ Dwayne Jarrett*

USC, 6-4, 214, 4.62

A tall possession receiver who can make big plays in the red zone. Uses his hands, long arms and big body to create space and shield defenders from the ball. Doesn't get consistent separation. Lacks the explosiveness and speed to hit



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Jarrett



11 Paul Williams

Fresno State, 6-1, 205, 4.45

Can make all the catches and win jump balls. A strong, dangerous runner after the catch. Reaches full speed quickly and can run past cornerbacks. Can be tackled easily if not running hard. Lacks toughness in traffic and drops too many passes. Has the talent to be an elite player but is not productive, tenacious or consistent.

THIRD ROUND

12 Craig Davis

LSU, 6-1 $\frac{3}{8}$, 202, 4.41

Has the footwork, explosiveness and speed to stretch the field and make big plays. Shows the consistent burst out of cuts to separate against man-to-man coverage. Doesn't break many tackles and occasionally goes down immediately.

SLEEPER

Derek Stanley. A small receiver who dominated at a lower level, Stanley has the quick feet and playing speed to make the jump to the NFL.

SNAPSHOT with Ted Ginn

My breakthrough moment as a college player was: My first touchdown freshman year—on a punt return against the University of Wisconsin.

My friends would describe my personality as: They would say I am calm, humble and happy.

The NFL player I can't wait to face is: Charles Woodson because he went to Michigan and is a great player.

The first thing I'll buy after I sign my contract is: A home for my parents because they mean everything to me.

Probably will be drafted lower than he deserves. Will be a productive receiver and a consistent touchdown threat.

13 David Clowney

Virginia Tech, 6-0 $\frac{1}{2}$, 188, 4.40

Has the hands to make difficult catches. Bursts past cornerbacks and separates quickly. Shows the speed to turn short passes into long touchdowns. Thin frame raises long-term durability questions. Struggles to come back and fight off corners on underthrown passes. Look for him to become a good starter who can change games with big plays.

14 Jacoby Jones

Lane College, 6-2 $\frac{5}{8}$, 210, 4.59

Gets off the snap quickly and has the speed to blow past corners. Must improve at getting in and out of cuts on short-to-medium patterns. Small hands lead to fumbling problems and inconsistent pass catching. Needs time to develop but has the potential to be a star receiver and return man.

15 Steve Breaston

Michigan, 6-0 $\frac{3}{8}$, 193, 4.47

Runs precise routes and makes sharp cuts. Willing to go over the middle. Adjusts nicely to bad passes and makes tough catches. Lacks the elite explosiveness and speed to get open downfield. Has the quickness, agility, route-running skills and hands to make it as a slot receiver. Also can contribute as a punt returner.



DAY 2 PROSPECTS

16. **Laurent Robinson** Illinois State

17. **Jemalle Cornelius** Florida

18. **Yamon Figurs** Kansas State

19. **Derek Stanley** Wis.-Whitewater

20. **▲ Johnnie Lee Higgins** UTEP

21. **Chris Davis** Florida State

22. **Dallas Baker** Florida

23. **Mike Walker** Central Florida

24. **Rhema McKnight** Notre Dame

25. **James Jones** San Jose State

26. **Chansi Stuckey** Clemson

27. **Brandon Myles** West Virginia

28. **Ryne Robinson** Miami (Ohio)

29. **Ryan Moore** Miami

30. **Courtney Taylor** Auburn

31. **Junior Taylor** UCLA

32. **Maurice Price*** Charleston Southern

33. **Vincent Marshall** Houston

34. **Marquay McDaniel** Hampton

35. **Joel Filani** Texas Tech

36. **Michael DePriest** TCU

Tall and strong and runs precise routes but occasionally loses focus and drops passes.

A late bloomer with a thin frame (5-10 $\frac{3}{4}$, 183). Eventually will become a starter who makes big plays.

Could contribute immediately as a returner but will need to sharpen his skills as a wide receiver.

A dangerous open-field runner who could be great on special teams. His size (5-9 $\frac{3}{4}$, 173) is a concern.

Has deceptive speed and runs good routes. Could become a good slot receiver and return man.

There's nothing spectacular about his game. Could make it as a backup slot receiver.

Has great size (6-3 $\frac{1}{8}$, 202) but lack of speed likely will make him a backup possession receiver.

Has good size and hands and is willing to catch passes in traffic. Will struggle to separate from corners.

Lacks big-play speed and explosiveness but will be a solid No. 3 who is well-suited to play the slot.

Doesn't have elite speed but likely will improve with experience and flash some big-play ability.

Has good speed and quickness but is short (5-10 $\frac{1}{8}$), lacks bulk and is timid going across the middle.

Runs sharp, precise routes and gets open on short passes but lacks elite speed and burst.

Runs sharp routes, shows the burst to separate and has no fear in traffic. Lacks size (5-9 $\frac{1}{8}$, 179).

Big, quick and tough and has the skills to develop into a starter, but there are character concerns.

Has the potential to be a possession receiver who catches passes in traffic and gains tough yards.

Could be a good possession receiver if he can recover the form he had before a 2005 knee injury.

Has good height, hands, long arms and athleticism but is a project whose game needs to be refined.

Lacks elite speed to compensate for his size (5-7 $\frac{3}{8}$, 165). Could become a solid return man.

Makes tough catches and changes directions in a blink but struggles to escape jams and break tackles.

Lacks breakaway speed but could be a possession receiver and special teams contributor.

Fast, and can run any route but lacks experience and will need time to polish his skills.

TE

POSITION
STRENGTH **C+**

FIRST ROUND

1 Greg Olsen*
Miami, 6-5½, 255, 4.55†

A polished receiver with soft hands. Has the size, speed and agility to abuse NFL linebackers in the passing game. Runs good routes, explodes upfield and can make would-be tacklers miss. An elite athlete but must improve greatly as a blocker to become a complete tight end. Doesn't hold up in pass protection and can be tossed to the ground by strong defenders.

SECOND ROUND

2 Zach Miller*
Arizona State, 6-4½, 255, 4.72

Will make an immediate impact as a receiver.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

If the ball is thrown in Olsen's vicinity, chances are he's going to come down with it.

Does a great job of twisting his body to catch off-target throws. Runs precise routes and has the burst to get separation and make big plays. Lacks brute strength but does a decent job as a blocker. Smart and versatile enough to play an H-back role or fullback.

SNAPSHOT with Zach Miller

My breakthrough moment in college was: As a freshman against Iowa, which was ranked, I caught two touchdown passes. We upset them in front of a big home crowd. It was a moment I'll never forget.

My college stats fail to show: I'm a better blocker than I get credit for. Most people think I'm just a pass catcher, but I have gotten better at blocking.

The NFL player I can't wait to face is: Since I'm from Arizona State, it would be fun to go against Terrell Suggs. He's a great pass rusher.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI / AP

THIRD ROUND

3 Ben Patrick
Delaware, 6-4, 250, 4.75

Has the size, hands and strength to make an

impact as a receiver and blocker. Has the quickness to get separation and the hands to make tough catches look routine. Doesn't finish blocks, run aggressively after making the catch or consistently wrap up the ball. Will become a solid starter but needs a year or two to develop.

SLEEPER

Luke Smith-Anderson. His speed, hands and route-running ability are better than most tight ends', but his ability to succeed will depend on staying healthy.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4. Martrez Milner Georgia | Has the talent to be a solid starter but is an underachiever who lacks aggressiveness as a blocker. |
| 5. Matt Spaeth Minnesota | Lacks speed but has the size, smarts and strength to be a fine blocker and solid receiver. |
| 6. Luke Smith-Anderson Idaho | Has major durability issues but has surprising quickness and speed for a player who has torn both ACLs. |
| 7. Gijon Robinson Missouri Western | Short (6-0¾) but versatile; could become a solid starter with improved strength and technique. |
| 8. Clark Harris Rutgers | Has the skills to be a solid blocker but lacks explosiveness as a receiver. Is best suited for a backup role. |
| 9. Tyler Ecker Michigan | A limited athlete but is smart and versatile enough to become a solid backup. |
| 10. ▲Zac Herold Nebraska-Omaha | Looked smooth and athletic at his pro day and vaulted himself into late-round consideration. |
| 11. Braden Jones Southern Illinois | Well-built prospect who has the skill set to be a solid backup and contribute as an H-back and fullback. |
| 12. Scott Chandler Iowa | Has excellent size (6-6¾, 265) but will struggle to get separation; could become a valuable backup. |
| 13. ▼Rodney Hannah Houston | Has rare combination of size (6-8, 270) and athleticism but never started in college and is very raw. |

OT

POSITION
STRENGTH **B+**

FIRST ROUND

1 Joe Thomas
Wisconsin, 6-6½, 311, 4.92†

More of a positional run blocker than a physi-

cally dominating one. On pass plays, shows quick footwork and slides out to the corner to cut off explosive edge rushers. Can be a rock against bull rushers but must use his hands better to jolt and slow ends. Has rare height and athleticism. Has all the tools and intangibles to be a great left tackle.

2 Levi Brown
Penn State, 6-5¼, 321, 5.42

Excels at position blocks on running plays; locks on to



his man and turns him out of the play. Sets up fast on pass plays and punches ends hard, which locks them up and eliminates them.

Never will be a mauler who attacks and pancakes defenders but can use his elite athleticism to dominate in pass protection and be efficient run blocking.

3 Tony Ugoh
Arkansas, 6-5¼, 301, 5.06
Excels at working around ends on

Pancakes may not be Brown's forte, but he's still an elite talent.

>> Joe Thomas went hunting in Nebraska after his pro day and shot a bison with a bow and arrow from 58 yards. >>>

running plays, pinning them inside on outside runs and sealing them outside on inside runs. Slides out easily to cut off edge rushers and holds his ground against bull rushers on pass plays. Will become an NFL starter because of his elite skills but will struggle to be consistent and maximize his potential.

SECOND ROUND

4 ▲ Joe Staley

Central Michigan, 6-5½, 305, 4.78

Redirects quickly to adjust to multiple pass-rush moves. Uses his good speed to pull on sweeps and block linebackers. Must be more aggressive; opponents get into his chest too easily and drive him backward. Isn't ready to battle for a starting job but could be a solid tackle with improved technique and strength.

5 ▼ Ryan Harris

Notre Dame, 6-4½, 305, 5.09

Doesn't fire off the snap aggressively, which hinders his ability to get movement. Blocks well in the open field, maintains good balance and adjusts well on the move. Slides out to the corners to cut off edge rushers easily. Naturally

JAY DROWNS / SN



strong but plays like he has below-average strength. Frustrates scouts because he doesn't play up to his talent level.

6 James Marten

Boston College, 6-7½, 310, 5.08

Turns heads because of his massive size—his biggest asset and greatest hindrance. Drives defensive linemen backward. Gets set quickly in pass protection and uses his hands well to maintain separation. Struggles to gain consistent leverage because he bends at the back instead of at the knees. Versatile enough to play anywhere

SNAPSHOT

with Joe Thomas

The part of my game I take the most pride in is: Being able to set the edge in pass pro. If you put me over there on the left side, the quarterback is never going to have to worry about the guy collapsing the pocket.

Best way to get in an opponent's head is: Beat them over and over and over and not say a word.

The first thing I'll buy after I sign my contract is: I'm getting married in July, so I'll probably try to pay off some of that. I'm not the type of person who really needs or wants a lot.

on the line—and even possibly move to center.

THIRD ROUND

7 ▲ Marshal Yanda

Iowa, 6-3¾, 305, 5.15

Gets out of his stance and sets up quickly. Has the speed to pull and lead outside runs. Is somewhat of a guard/tackle 'tweener; lacks the athleticism to pass protect outside and the strength to play inside. Must bulk up, become more aggressive and get more seasoning before competing for an NFL starting job.

SLEEPER

Daniel Parrish.

For a tackle his size, Parrish is surprisingly light on his feet, as well as strong. He has the tools to be a very good starter in the NFL.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

8. ▲ Gabe Hall Texas Tech

Raw prospect who has rare athleticism for the position. Could become a solid starter in time.

9. ▲ Allen Barbre Missouri Southern

Undisciplined; needs to improve his technique. Has NFL-caliber athleticism and physical tools.

10. Adam Koets Oregon State

Could compensate for his lack of bulk (6-5½, 302) and athleticism with smarts and sound technique.

11. Julius Wilson UAB

Instinctive. Can drive linemen backward but needs to be more consistent. Could get a look at guard.

12. Daniel Parrish Florida A&M

Needs extensive technique work but has the size (6-6¼, 341) to dominate at the point of attack.

13. ▲ Doug Free Northern Illinois

Quick-footed and plays with good technique. Is too passive; unlikely to be more than a third-stringer.

14. Herbert Taylor TCU

Excellent finesse blocker who must develop a mean streak to be an NFL starter. Needs to bulk up.

15. Mike Otto Purdue

Has the speed to pull and reach the second level but lacks aggressiveness. Likely to stick as a backup.

16. Rob Austin Troy

Project player; with added bulk and improved technique, could become a starter in a few seasons.

17. Jacob Bender Nicholls State

Aggressive blocker. Needs a lot of work in pass protection but could start at some point.

18. Charles Harris Washington State

Quick-footed; plays with good leverage. Inconsistency, poor technique will limit him to backup duty.

19. Mario Henderson Florida State

A better athlete than football player right now. With improved technique, could make it as a backup.

20. Chris Denman Fresno State

A limited athlete but maintains a solid base in protection. Has the versatility to play guard.

G

POSITION
STRENGTH **G+**

SECOND ROUND

1 Justin Blalock

Texas, 6-3¼, 321, 5.15+

Has the power to drive opponents off the

line. Fires off at the snap and has excellent speed and athleticism. Relies too much on his natural strength and needs to improve his footwork and technique. Struggles to maintain blocks in pass protection. Played mostly tackle in college but is best suited for guard in the NFL.

THIRD ROUND

2 ▲ Ben Grubbs

Auburn, 6-2¾, 314, 5.10

Smart player with the speed to pull and lead outside runs; also traps well inside. Gets set quickly in pass protection but must improve

MICHAEL SCHWARZ FOR SN



Give Grubbs a year or two and he'll be a starter.

>> Justin Blalock scored an 1,120 on his SAT—as a seventh-grader. The score landed him at an elite academic camp. >>>

his hand punch. Needs to get into better shape and be more aggressive. Look for him to develop into a starter within a year or two.

3 Arron Sears
Tennessee, 6-3 $\frac{1}{4}$, 319, 5.09

Already is an NFL-caliber run blocker but needs time to improve as a pass protector. Has good size and strength. Eliminates his target once locked on. Lacks ideal agility. Struggles with his footwork in pass protection and against rushers who shoot gaps. Played tackle in college but is a better fit at guard.

SLEEPER

Andy Alleman.

He needs to bulk up a little to make it in the NFL, but Alleman has excellent instincts and toughness and can eliminate opponents on seal blocks.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

4. **Uche Nwaneri** Purdue
5. **Brandon Frye** Virginia Tech
6. **Manuel Ramirez** Texas Tech
7. **▲ Andy Alleman** Akron
8. **▼ Mansfield Wrotto** Georgia Tech
9. **Doug Datish** Ohio State
10. **Tala Esera** Hawaii
11. **Mike Jones** Iowa
12. **Erik Robertson** California
13. **Kurt Quarterman** Louisville
14. **Scott Smith** California
15. **Brian Daniels** Colorado

Struggles some against speed rushers but is a solid all-around player. Eventually will become a starter. Has great tools but rarely plays to his potential. Might never be more than a backup tackle/guard. Strong, thick-bodied guard with marginal quickness. Could be a backup in a power-blocking scheme. Usually holds his ground against straight-line rushers. Limited athleticism might keep him from starting. Played on the O-line only one year in college. Can be great when he uses his hands well. Smart, but lacks ideal strength. Can play any position on the line but is best suited for an interior role. Finesse blocker who often gets pushed around. Will move inside after playing tackle in college. Tough, and blocks with good leverage. Lacks great athleticism but could become a productive starter. Gets the most out of his ability and is efficient but struggles to maintain blocks. Will stick as a backup. Has the strength to be a starter but won't last long in the NFL without improved aggressiveness. Could develop into a starter for a team that prizes athleticism over size and brute strength. Productive in pass protection but lacks agility and needs to play more aggressively. A likely backup.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

SNAPSHOT

with **Justin Blalock**

My favorite college moment was: Watching Vince Young score the winning touchdown in the national championship game. It was like watching a movie. You couldn't have scripted it any better.

The kind of offense I fit best in is: I could be happy playing in Philadelphia, where they throw the ball 70 percent of the time, or in Kansas City, where they run it all the time. It doesn't matter.

I'm better than most at my position because: Of the preparation that goes into each game. Most of the game is mental. That's my edge.

C

POSITION
STRENGTH **B-**

SECOND ROUND

1 Josh Beekman
Boston College, 6-1 $\frac{5}{8}$, 309, 5.45†

Excels at getting off snaps and into defensive tackles quickly. Plays with a mean streak. Maintains leverage consistently and can slide to negate quick pass-rush moves. Gets downfield quickly to block line-backers. Strong enough to hold his ground

SLEEPER

Lyle Sendlein.

Despite having a productive college career, Sendlein has received little publicity. But he has the quickness and smarts to become a good starter.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

4. **Enoka Lucas** Oregon
5. **Leroy Harris** N.C. State
6. **Lyle Sendlein** Texas
7. **Mark Fenton** Colorado
8. **▲ Scott Stephenson** Iowa State



Beekman anchors a line with quickness, strength and a healthy dose of nastiness.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

against bull rushers but struggles some against long-armed tackles. Must improve his flexibility to become elite.

THIRD ROUND

2 Ryan Kalil
USC, 6-2 $\frac{3}{4}$, 299, 4.96

One of the most technically sound line prospects in recent years. Shows nice instincts and footwork and blocks with leverage. Lacks the strength to move the pile in the running game and gets driven backward by big nose tackles. Will be a good starter for a team that values athleticism and smarts.

3 ▲ Samson Satele
Hawaii, 6-2 $\frac{5}{8}$, 300, 5.24

Gets out of his stance quickly to lead outside runs and reach the second level. Shows the flexibility to block with leverage. More of a finesse positional run blocker and gets pushed around too often. Has potential but must use good technique consistently to develop into a solid starter.

DE

POSITION
STRENGTH **A**

FIRST ROUND

1 Gaines Adams

Clemson, 6-4¾, 261, 4.65†

The most explosive pass rusher in the draft. Very polished, with a variety of moves. Has the speed and burst to chase down plays all over the field. Less effective on runs to his side of the formation; plays upright and can be engulfed. Diagnoses plays quickly. Could play linebacker in a 3-4. Expected to start as a rookie.

2 Jamaal Anderson*

Arkansas, 6-5¾, 284, 4.75

Strong at the point of attack against the run but sometimes loses focus and plays too upright. Very productive pass rusher when aggressive. Can beat blockers inside or outside. Lacks great initial quickness but has surprising speed in pursuit. Delivers a blow as a tackler. Needs a year or two of seasoning but has the tools to be dominant.

3 Charles Johnson*

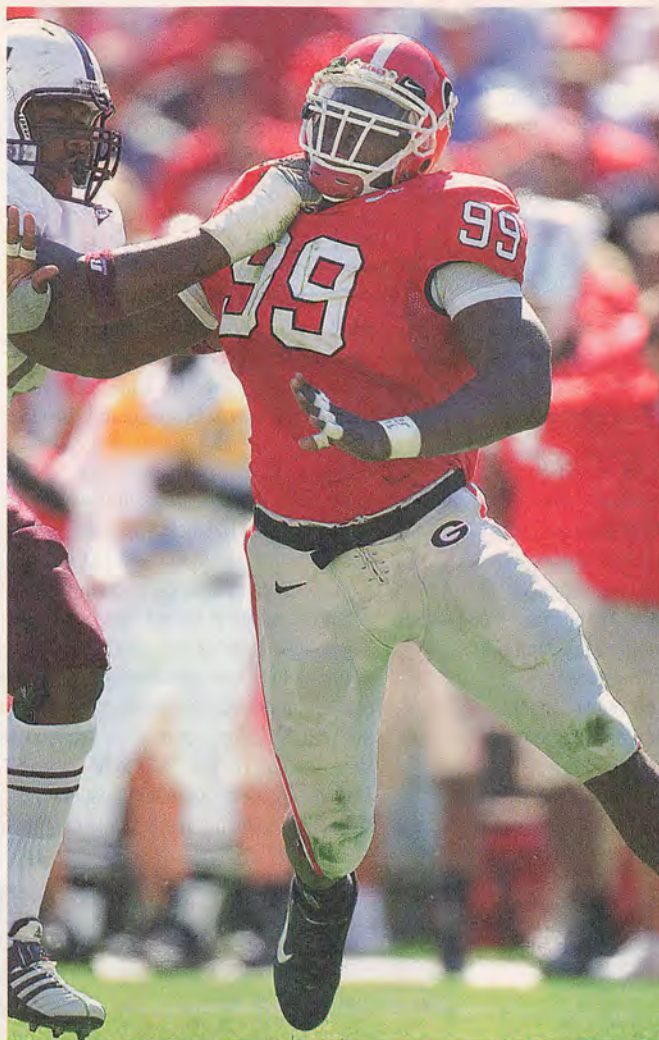
Georgia, 6-2¼, 270, 4.86

Has the strength to be a force against the run and pass. Keeps runs inside and can shed blockers to make tackles. Never will be a top pass rusher; lacks explosiveness off the snap. Has the sneaky speed to chase down ballcarriers and uses his long arms to wrap up. Could be a great 4-3 strong-side end or a solid 3-4 end.

4 Adam Carriker

Nebraska, 6-6, 291, 4.72

Uses his hands to lock on to linemen and hold up at the point of attack. Can chase down backs. Lacks the explosiveness off the snap to threaten the corner. Doesn't redirect quickly, which hinders his ability to move



BOB LEVERONE / SN (2)

No matter what scheme Johnson lands in, he has the all-around skills to be a force.

SNAPSHOT

with **Jamaal Anderson**

The biggest transition to the NFL will be: Looking at football as a business. It's a job now.

The NFL player I am most like is: I'd say Julius Peppers (Panthers) or Michael Strahan (Giants). I've been told we have similar body types. And those guys have a basketball background like I do.

The first thing I'll buy after I sign my contract will be: I'm going to get my dad a car. And I'll buy my mother in Little Rock a house with a big kitchen. She always has wanted a big kitchen to have enough room to cook for me.



through traffic. An end/tackle 'tweener whose greatest value may be as a 3-4 end.

5 Jarvis Moss*

Florida, 6-6½, 258, 4.76

Anticipates snaps well and has the burst to beat tackles around the corner. Shows good pass-rush moves to beat one-on-one blocks. Needs to add bulk; struggles to shed blockers when not using his hands well. A great all-around athlete who will become a productive pass rusher in time.

SECOND ROUND

6 Ikaika Alama-Francis

Hawaii, 6-5½, 276, 4.85

Has the strength to dominate at the point of attack when he plays with good leverage and aggressiveness. Can bull rush blockers but lacks complementary pass-rush moves.

Keeps running plays in front of him. Doesn't consistently play with good technique or anticipate snaps well. Needs grooming but will develop into a solid end.

7 Ray McDonald

Florida, 6-3¾, 282, 4.88

Gets off the snap quickly and makes plays in the backfield. Can bull rush linemen into the quarterback but lacks the explosiveness to be a speed rusher. Gets good arm extension to lock out blockers. Plays high at times, which hurts him at the point of attack. Can also play tackle. Will be a good starter in any system.

8 LaMarr Woodley

Michigan, 6-1½, 265, 4.74

Strong, with great fundamentals. Plays with leverage at the point of attack. Carries out his assignments and makes tackles in pursuit. A bit short; struggles to shed big linemen. Lacks the explosiveness off the snap

to be an edge rusher. Something of an end/linebacker 'tweener who likely will become a solid strongside 4-3 end.

THIRD ROUND

9 Anthony Spencer

Purdue, 6-2½, 265, 4.69

Quick; can chase down ballcarriers from the back side. Takes on run blocks with good leverage. Plays with great technique. Lacks explosiveness to the corner and strength at the

point of attack. Doesn't consistently move well through traffic. Can become a solid end but will need to improve in coverage if drafted as a linebacker.

10 Victor Abiamiri

Notre Dame, 6-4¼, 267, 4.81

Polished, with excellent footwork. Excels at bull rushing with leverage but will struggle to beat tackles to the corner. Shows great strength at the point of attack; can clog the hole and shed blocks to make tackles. Lacks speed and the elite

athleticism to be dominant but could develop into a solid, well-rounded end.

11 Baraka Atkins

Miami, 6-4½, 271, 4.70

Splits double-teams with his strength and quickness and has polished pass-rush moves. Lacks the speed to be a dangerous edge rusher. When using his hands aggressively against the run, holds his ground, then sheds and makes the tackle. Versatile 'tweener; best suited to start at strong-side end and move inside on passing downs.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

SLEEPER

Jason Trusnik. A

A hard-nosed warrior type of end, Trusnik was incredibly productive in college. He'd be ideal as a backup who makes plays rushing the QB.

12. Dan Bazuin Central Michigan

Has a quick first step. Must improve his pass-rush leverage but will become a solid 4-3 starter.

13. ▲ Brian Robison Texas

Good in pursuit but lacks ideal size (6-2¾, 256) and speed. Could switch to outside linebacker.

14. ▼ Quentin Moses Georgia

Has first-round talent but rarely plays with leverage or intensity and lacks bulk.

15. Jay Moore Nebraska

Smart, with good instincts and playmaking ability. Could be a 4-3 end or a 3-4 rush linebacker.

16. Antwan Applewhite* San Diego St.

Should've stayed in school. Has good speed to the edge but needs to bulk up to reach his potential.

17. Jermaine McElveen UAB

Plays bigger than his size (6-4, 250) and could develop into a solid starter if he adds some muscle.

18. Tim Crowder Texas

Well-built for a strongside defender but looks better than he plays. Projects as a backup at best.

19. C.J. Ah You Oklahoma

Late-round project who could develop into a good backup. Smart, but struggles to shed blocks.

20. Marquies Gunn Auburn

Thin; can be driven out of plays. A good pass rusher who might be better as a 3-4 rush linebacker.

21. Justin Hickman UCLA

Lacks the size (6-1¾, 255) to hold up vs. the run and the burst to be an edge rusher.

22. Larry Birdine Oklahoma

An intriguing developmental prospect with great athleticism. Must become more productive.

23. Jason Trusnik Ohio Northern

Instinctive; sniffs out plays. Could contribute on special teams while adding bulk to play defense.

DT

POSITION
STRENGTH **A-**

FIRST ROUND

1 ▼ Alan Branch*

Michigan, 6-5¾, 324, 5.07†

Consistently clogs the middle. Sheds one-on-one blocks and makes tackles at the line. Holds his ground against double-teams. Has no real pass-rush moves other than a bull rush. Lacks the explosiveness to shoot gaps and penetrate the backfield consistently. Would be an ideal nose tackle, especially in a 3-4 scheme.

2 ▲ Amobi Okoye

Louisville, 6-2, 301, 4.85

Penetrates the backfield consistently to blow up plays. Strong enough to clog the hole, shed blocks and make the tackle. Shows rare strength, quickness and explosiveness as a pass rusher. Occasionally takes a misstep or stands flat-footed when not recognizing the play. Has the

Branch looks like the perfect candidate for a nose job in a 3-4 scheme.



DRAFT DATA >> Amobi Okoye, at 19 years, 322 days, will be one day older when he is drafted than OT Jamie Nails was at the time of his selection by the Bills in 1997. >>

talent to produce in any scheme but is best suited as a one-gap player in a 4-3.

SECOND ROUND

3 DeMarcus "Tank" Tyler

N.C. State, 6-2½, 306, 5.34

Sheds blocks quickly and makes tackles on runs right at him. Chases down running backs outside. Has burst off the snap, gets underneath blockers and drives them into the quarterback on pass plays. Occasionally runs too upright in pursuit and overruns the ball. Will need a season or two to adjust to the NFL but could excel in any scheme.

4 Justin Harrell

Tennessee, 6-4¾, 314, 5.05

Makes plays with his size and strength when he gets good leverage and uses his hands properly to fight blocks. Not quick or explosive off the snap, which limits his ability to penetrate gaps. Must improve his tackling technique. Has durability concerns. Strong and athletic enough to play end in a 3-4 but would fit best as a two-gap tackle in a 4-3.

5 Marcus Thomas

Florida, 6-2¾, 314, 5.23
Has the quickness to be consistently disruptive. Shows the hand punch and strength to jolt linemen and drive them back into the quarterback's lap. Has an effective bull rush. Figures to have trouble against



JAY DROWINS / SN

SNAPSHOT

with **Amobi Okoye**

The part of my game that needs the most work is: I've been told that I play high, but I worked on that a lot this year. I'm still not satisfied. Oh, and when the offensive lineman is holding the crap out of me, breaking his wrists and teaching him a lesson.

My pregame ritual is: I always pray on the bench after the coin toss is done. Also, one of my teammates writes "quarterback killer" on my wrist guards.

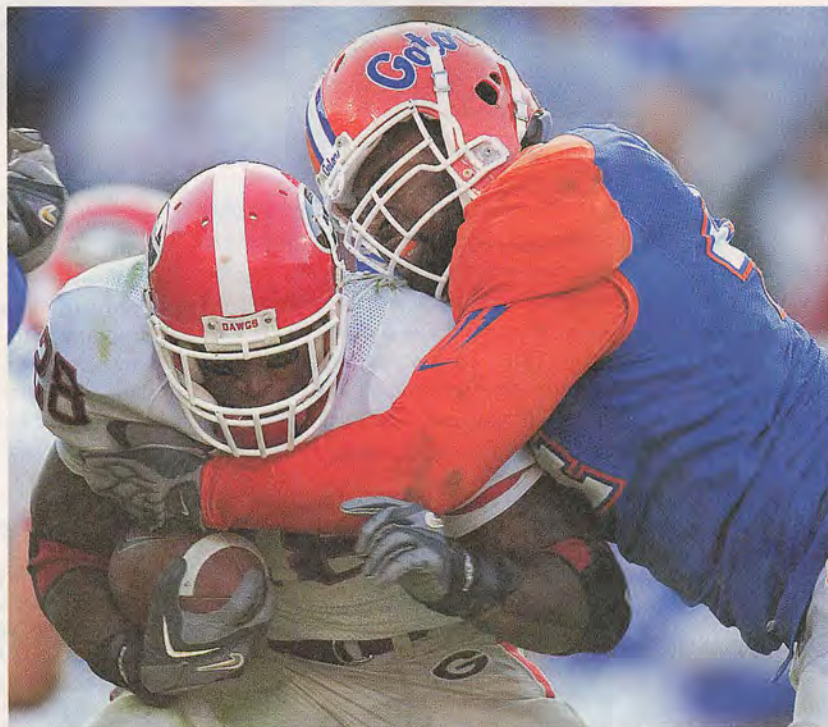
People might be surprised to know: I can't swim. I can't play basketball to save my life.

mammoth offensive linemen. A character risk. Not likely to be an attention-grabbing sack artist but can control the interior. Best suited for a two-gap scheme.

6 Paul Soliai

Utah, 6-4, 344, 5.12

Has rare size, strength, quickness and athleticism. Can be a force at the point. Makes tackles on runs directly at him and can chase down ballcarriers between the hash marks. Not a productive pass rusher. Former offensive tackle will be a strong, powerful, two-gap player who clogs the middle against the run and collapses the pocket.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

There's no questioning Thomas' talent, but his off-field issues make him a risky pick.

THIRD ROUND

7 Brandon Mebane

California, 6-1½, 309, 5.17

Fast enough to make plays in pursuit and has the closing burst to finish tackles. Uses a strong club move to jolt guards and pressure quarterbacks. Lacks ideal size and can be engulfed by blockers. Production is inconsistent. Needs to improve technique. Could become a starter with improved hand use and leverage.

SLEEPER

Trey Lewis. Has the quickness, explosiveness and agility to become a starter, but he must improve his playing strength and will need time to make the jump to the NFL.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

8. ▼ Kareem Brown Miami

9. Jeremy Clark Alabama

10. Trey Lewis Washburn

11. Ryan McBean Oklahoma State

12. Matt Toeaina Oregon

13. Keith Jackson Arkansas

14. Quinn Pitcock Ohio State

15. Cliff Ryan Michigan State

16. Kelly Talavou Utah

17. Ola Dagunduro Nebraska

18. Turk McBride Tennessee

19. Louis Leonard Fresno State

20. Derek Landri Notre Dame

Was a rotation player until his senior season. Must become more productive to be an NFL starter.

Can clog the hole at the point of attack and chase down plays but rarely penetrates into the backfield.

Surprisingly polished for a Division II player. Likely to be a starter within a year or two.

An end/tackle 'tweener who isn't polished or productive but could contribute in a rotation system.

Could become a solid starter in a 4-3 or 3-4 scheme but must improve his play against the run.

Not an explosive playmaker but is a strong and athletic two-gap player with the skills to be a starter.

Will struggle against strong or athletic O-linemen. Best suited to be a reserve sparkplug.

Versatile and productive. He's an end/tackle 'tweener more suited to playing tackle.

Will fit best in a 3-4 scheme as a nose tackle who can take up space and keep blockers off linebackers.

Short (6-1½), and doesn't make a lot of tackles, but he's stocky and sure clogs up the middle.

Strong and athletic but lacks experience. Will need time to develop but could be a solid backup.

Can be disruptive, especially when he plays with a nasty streak, but needs to maintain good leverage.

Undersized, and struggles to hold his ground on runs right at him but could contribute as a backup.

>> Alan Branch, now 324 pounds, got some time at point guard as a senior on his high school basketball team and returned punts for the football team. >>

OLB

POSITION
STRENGTH **B**

FIRST ROUND

1 Paul Posluszny

Penn State, 6-1 $\frac{1}{4}$, 236, 4.58†

Diagnoses plays accurately and quickly. Fills holes aggressively. Has the speed to chase plays from sideline to sideline but struggles some when moving through traffic. Can stay with running backs and tight ends all over the field. Came back strong from a knee injury as a junior. Few linebackers are as equally adept against the run and pass.

2 Jon Beason*

Miami, 6-0 $\frac{1}{4}$, 237, 4.75

Attacks the line and blows up plays in the backfield. Undersized; struggles some against lead blockers in the hole. Has the speed to chase down plays in pursuit. Sometimes is too aggressive; bites hard on fakes and leaves cutback lanes wide-open. Drops into zone coverage quickly. Needs some work but is an upper-tier, three-down linebacker.

SECOND ROUND

3 Lawrence Timmons*

Florida State, 6-0 $\frac{3}{4}$, 233, 4.63

Has the speed and athleticism to make plays all over the field. Takes on lead blockers and forces outside runs inside. Doesn't play with good technique. Not quick off the snap but reads plays well. Polished in coverage and can deliver violent hits. The best strongside linebacker in this class; could be effective in a 4-3 or 3-4 scheme.

SLEEPER

Stephen Nicholas. A tough 'backer with good instincts, Nicholas makes plays all over the field. He lacks top athleticism but will become a productive starter.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

6. **Rory Johnson*** Mississippi
7. **Antwan Barnes** Fla. International
8. **Juwan Simpson** Alabama
9. **Stephen Nicholas** South Florida
10. **Dallas Sartz** USC
11. **Clint Session** Pitt
12. **Earl Everett** Florida
13. **Sam Olajubutu** Arkansas
14. **Brian Crum** Florida
15. **Chad Nkang** Elon

A major character risk. Has the talent to be a weakside starter but is unlikely to fulfill his potential.

Excellent athlete. Must make the transition from college end and projects as a backup.

Solid in coverage. Needs to improve his lower-body strength. Could be a nice weakside player.

Has grown on scouts. Reads and reacts quickly. Can get engulfed by bigger blockers.

Fluid in coverage. Needs to be more aggressive but could be a Day 2 steal if the light finally goes on.

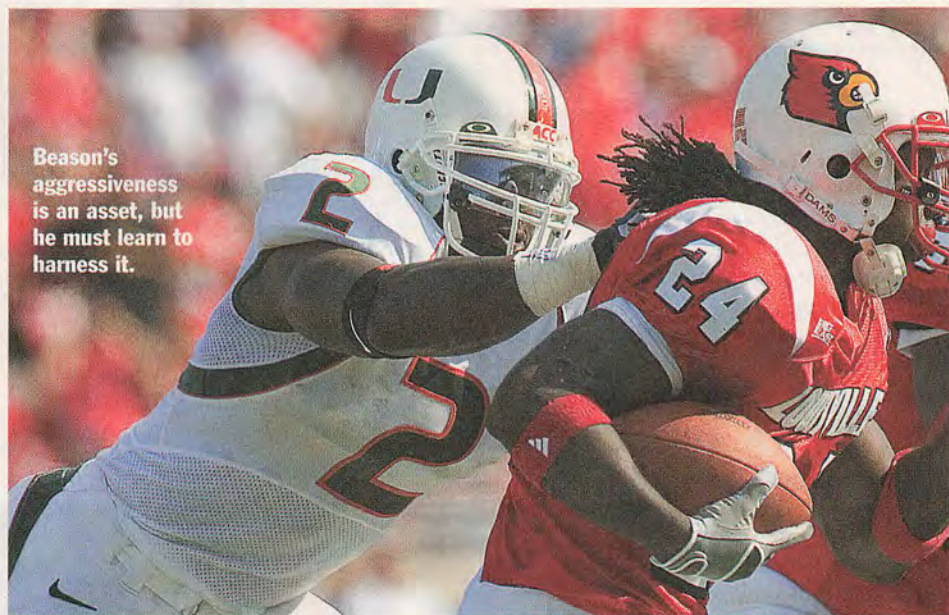
Undersized (5-11, 236), but could stick in a cover 2 scheme. Has the speed to chase down plays.

Has great athleticism and instincts but doesn't make many big plays. Best suited for the cover 2.

Lacks size (5-8 $\frac{3}{4}$, 227) but has the athleticism to become an elite player on special teams.

A work in progress, with the talent to become a strongside starter. Must maintain better focus.

Fluid in coverage, with good speed. Needs to bulk up and minimize his mental mistakes.



Beason's aggressiveness is an asset, but he must learn to harness it.

JAY DROWNS / SN

4 Rufus Alexander

Oklahoma, 6-0 $\frac{7}{8}$, 232, 4.69

Attacks plays and fills holes quickly. Doesn't always use good leverage and can be ridden out of plays. Moves through traffic quickly and has the speed to make plays near the sideline. An aggressive blitzing and sound open-field tackler. Alert in picking up running backs and tight ends in man coverage. Doesn't often get fooled by play-action fakes and misdirection. Expected to become a great weakside starter.

THIRD ROUND

5 Stewart Bradley

Nebraska, 6-3 $\frac{3}{4}$, 258, 4.73

Moves well in the open field. Smart; gets in good position and forces runs back inside. Productive as a pass rusher and comfortable dropping into zone coverage. Rarely makes game-changing plays. Lacks the speed to make plays sideline to sideline and sometimes struggles to shed blockers. Versatile. Projects as a solid strongside starter in a 4-3.



PRESTON C. MACK FOR SN

SNAPSHOT

with **Paul Posluszny**

Opponents would say the best thing I do is: I am a sure tackler. If I get to the ball, I'll make the play.

The part of my game that needs the most work is: Definitely using my hands to get off blockers.

When I score my first NFL touchdown: If I'm fortunate to have someone in the stands wearing my jersey, I will give them the ball.

The first thing I'll buy after I sign my contract: I'll get my dad a new car. Knowing him, it will be something basic, not like a BMW. But let's say I'll get him a Mustang.

ILB

POSITION
STRENGTH **B-**

FIRST ROUND

1 Patrick Willis

Mississippi, 6-1½, 242, 4.51†

Never stops chasing the ball and makes plays all over the field. Aggressive, with the strength to drive lead blockers into the backfield. Must use his hands better to shed blocks. Lacks elite speed but compensates by reading and reacting quickly. Solid in coverage. Not a franchise linebacker but ideal for a team that values intangibles and versatility.

2 ▲David Harris

Michigan, 6-2¼, 245, 4.60

Doesn't make mental mistakes. Stays under control when making open-field tackles. Shows good instincts when reading short passes and closes quickly. Tough at the point of attack but struggles some to move through traffic. Lacks explosiveness and speed. Could become a solid starter for a team that doesn't require him to play man coverage.

SECOND ROUND

3 ▲Justin Durant

Hampton, 6-0⅞, 229, 4.52

Plays with passion. Reads and reacts to plays in a blink. Has an explosive closing burst and aggressively fills holes inside. Delivers violent hits. Lacks the strength to shed blocks and the bulk to hold his ground at the point of attack. Can be overaggressive and overrun the ball. Best suited for a 4-3 scheme.

SLEEPER

Michael Okwo.

At Stanford, Okwo was consistently productive against the run and the pass. He has the build, strength and athleticism to be a solid starter in the NFL.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

7. **Buster Davis** Florida State

8. **Quinton Culbertson** Mississippi St.

9. **Zach Latimer** Oklahoma

10. **Michael Okwo** Stanford

11. **Tony Taylor** Georgia

12. **Brandon Siler*** Florida

13. **▲Anthony Waters** Clemson

14. **Justin Warren** Texas A&M

A playmaker who flies around the field. Lacks size (5-9¼, 242) but could be a productive starter.

High-energy player. Has the strength and instincts to become a starter after a few years of seasoning. Lacks elite speed and range but finds a way to make plays. Could be a starter in the right scheme.

Doesn't have the explosiveness to be a game-changer but works to the whistle and gets the job done. Undersized (6-0½, 236), but is consistently around the ball. A likely backup and special teamer.

Needs technique work. Might be a solid starter if he doesn't have to play much in coverage.

Aggressive; makes plays all over the field. Could become a decent two-down linebacker if healthy.

Must play with greater intensity. Has starter tools but will need time to learn a new defense.

THIRD ROUND

4 H.B. Blades

Pitt, 5-10¾, 237, 4.69

Shows great instincts and reaches full speed quickly. Strong, and tackles with good leverage. Consistently around the ball. Gets caught upright while trying to find the ball and has trouble shedding blockers. Will struggle in man coverage. Has durability concerns. Despite his lack of height, will become a good starter.

5 Zak DeOssie

Brown, 6-4½, 249, 4.59

Big, strong 'backer with good instincts. Has the

SNAPSHOT with Patrick Willis

My opponents would say the best thing I do is: Run to the ball. They never catch me standing around or not being around the ball.

The part of my game that needs the most work is: Probably my pass coverage. I need to learn how to jump routes. I'm used to just dropping into zones and not really playing a receiver.

The NFL player I can't wait to face is: Jerious Norwood (Falcons). He got the best of me the last time we played them, when he still was at Mississippi State.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

speed to chase down plays in pursuit. Reads quarterbacks well in zone coverage. An aggressive blitzer. Lacks the agility and flexibility to play well in space. Can be a physical hitter but whiffs on too many tackles. Not consistently aggressive taking on blockers. Will become a quality starter.

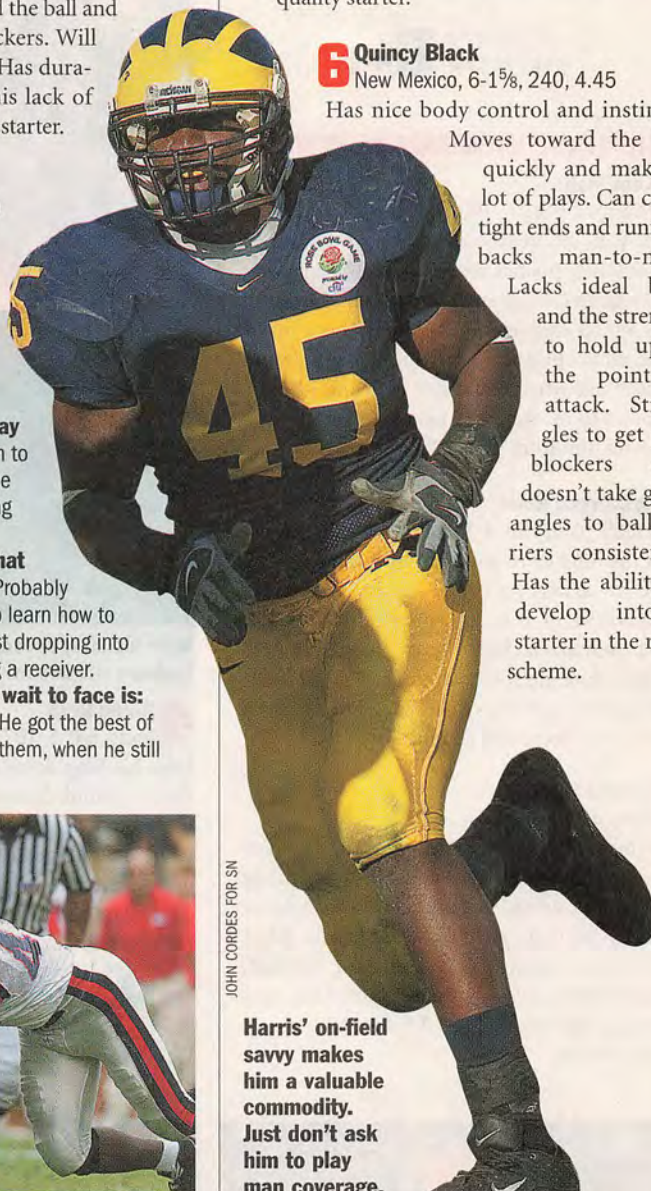
6 Quincy Black

New Mexico, 6-1½, 240, 4.45

Has nice body control and instincts.

Moves toward the ball quickly and makes a lot of plays. Can cover tight ends and running backs man-to-man.

Lacks ideal bulk and the strength to hold up at the point of attack. Struggles to get past blockers and doesn't take good angles to ballcarriers consistently. Has the ability to develop into a starter in the right scheme.



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

Harris' on-field savvy makes him a valuable commodity. Just don't ask him to play man coverage.

CB

POSITION
STRENGTH **B+**

FIRST ROUND

1 Leon Hall

Michigan, 5-11¼, 193, 4.40†

Does well in nearly all types of coverage. Consistently pushes receivers off their routes. Shows good closing speed on passes in front of him, which enables him to break them up or make interceptions. Sometimes loses a step in off coverage when turning to run, and he lacks the burst to recover. Willingness to get physical separates him from the pack.

2▲Darrelle Revis*

Pitt, 5-11½, 196, 4.38

Uses his long arms to break up passes or pull receivers' arms apart after the ball arrives. Is competitive in run support; fights through blocks to make tackles. Is not consistently productive. Must improve technique. Has the talent to be a good starting cornerback but needs to improve his backpedal significantly.

3 Tanard Jackson

Syracuse, 6-0, 200, 4.53

Has good size and long arms and the speed to stay with receivers downfield. Transitions nicely out of his backpedal to plant, drive and close on the ball. Can make strong, violent tackles. Must show better timing when going for the ball. Occasionally is overaggressive against the run; will lunge and miss tackles. A future NFL starter in any scheme.



PAUL NISELY / SN

With his size, speed and ability to blow up ballcarriers, Jackson will become a fixture in an NFL secondary.

4 Aaron Ross

Texas, 6-0½, 197, 4.46

Uses his long arms to jolt receivers and push them around. Shows a great closing burst to make plays on passes in front of him. Willing to come up and tackle but is not aggressive flying upfield and doesn't deliver big hits. Has the look, demeanor and playmaking ability to be a good NFL cornerback.

5 Marcus McCauley

Fresno State, 6-0¾, 203, 4.40

Has rare explosiveness and speed for a tall corner.

SNAPSHOT

with **Daymeion Hughes**

The NFL player I can't wait to face is:

Keyshawn (Johnson) is from my neighborhood, so I want to play against him. Steve Smith seems to burn everybody, so I want to see how I measure up against people like him.

A big misconception about me is: People probably think I'm really tall and lanky because if you check the media guide, they always lie and say I'm like 6-2. I'm really like 5-11.

This time next year people will be saying: Defensive rookie of the year. That's my next goal.



DILIP VISHWANATH / SN ARCHIVES

Breaks up a lot of passes and delivers hard hits if unable to reach the ball. Jolts receivers at the line and squeezes them to the sideline. Sometimes gets too aggressive and misses tackles while trying to deliver big hits. May seem risky for a Round 1 pick, but he is an amazing talent who won't fall too far.

6▲Chris Houston*

Arkansas, 5-9¾, 185, 4.33

Has the speed to cover receivers tightly all over the field in man coverage. Can jam receivers with a hard punch and slow their releases. Gets beaten by quick open-field moves. Doesn't make many plays to break up passes and allows too many completions. Would have been better off staying in school to improve his production.

SECOND ROUND

7▲Eric Wright*

UNLV, 5-10½, 192, 4.36

Has the speed to run with receivers downfield and the explosive burst

to recover after getting beat. Shows great ball skills. Makes strong, physical tackles in run support. Is a character risk; transferred from USC after some off-field legal issues. Can be a good starter—with improved discipline off the field and improved technique on it.

8▼Daymeion Hughes

California, 5-11½, 192, 4.55

Consistently stays with receivers despite lacking elite speed and explosiveness. Excels in most tight man-to-man situations; is most effective when keeping his hands on receivers and being physical throughout routes. Lack of closing speed is his biggest deficiency. Comes up quickly in run support. Best suited to play in a cover 2 defense.

9 Josh Wilson

Maryland, 5-9¼, 189, 4.40

Has the elite speed to run with receivers downfield. Shows good man-to-man technique. Gets physical with receivers. An explosive and dangerous return man and an outstanding gunner on punt coverage. Lacks ideal height and gets pushed around by big receivers. Could become a good starter if he can refine his backpedal and make more plays on the ball.

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THIRD ROUND

10 David Irons
Auburn, 5-10¼, 190, 4.45

Physical and aggressive; enjoys jamming receivers. Closes quickly on passes in front of him. Tough in run support. Footwork is raw. Struggles to recover after allowing separation. Sometimes gets out of control going for open-field tackles. Eventually will be a good starter because of his man-to-man skills and tackling ability in run support.

11 Jonathan Wade
Tennessee, 5-10, 188, 4.36

Jams receivers and can turn and run without losing a step. Shows good athleticism when maintaining good footwork and technique but must improve his technique, especially in man coverage. Slips and falls too often because of a lack of body control and balance. Must wrap up

better to avoid missing tackles. His realistic ceiling is as a nickel back.

12 Michael Coe
Alabama State, 6-0½, 190, 4.49

Sticks with receivers on short routes and consistently breaks up passes. Uses his hands and body to reroute and squeeze receivers. Lacks the elite speed to stick with the fastest NFL receivers. Doesn't always work hard in run support and can get blocked too easily. Could become a good starter who excels in physical man coverage.

13 Tony Franklin
Virginia, 5-9¾, 185, 4.67

Has the quickness and speed to cover receivers all over the field. Plants, drives and closes on passes in front of him in a flash. Has the burst to recover from mistakes. Sometimes gets too aggressive; often bites on fakes and double moves and misses tackles. Has the tools to be a

productive pro but must improve his footwork.

14 Tarell Brown
Texas, 5-10½, 189, 4.42

Has the ability to cover receivers all over the field when his technique is good. Will play hurt and consistently is a factor in run support. Struggles to stay with receivers out of their cuts. Has the physical tools, competitiveness, strength and toughness to be a good starting cornerback but needs a lot of work on his fundamentals.

15 Anthony Arline
Baylor, 6-1¾, 198, 4.44

Solid in man-to-man coverage; jams receivers nicely and makes plays on the ball. Adept in zone coverage. Lacks the elite speed to stay with fast receivers downfield. Must add bulk and get stronger. Not a good tackler. In college, excelled near the goal line against fade routes. Could become a good nickel corner.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

16. Marcus Hamilton Virginia

17. Travarous Bain Hampton

18. C.J. Wilson Baylor

19. Calvin Bannister Hampton

20. Fred Bennett South Carolina

21. Kenny Scott Georgia Tech

22. John Bowie Cincinnati

23. Ryan Smith* Florida

24. Montavious Pitts Jacksonville St.

25. Tim Mixon California

26. DeAndre Jackson Iowa State

27. Derrick Roberson Rutgers

28. Corey Graham New Hampshire

29. Chaz Williams Louisiana-Monroe

30. Marquice Cole Northwestern

Big and athletic enough to play corner but needs to develop more consistent footwork and reads.

Raw, but has good height, explosiveness and speed. Could develop into a solid starter in a few years.

Lacks the skills to play corner but will need to be more physical in order to make the move to safety.

Too short (5-7½) to be a starter but could be a valuable nickel back and a great special teams player.

Has above-average speed and quickness, but his ball skills are only modest and he's a poor tackler.

Has some good physical attributes. Must improve his footwork, especially his backpedal, and ball skills.

Even if he doesn't develop further, he'll be a solid backup and a standout gunner on the punt team.

Slight frame and poor fundamentals are strikes against him, but he has the skills to be a good No. 3 corner.

Will need a strong position coach and a veteran role model to help him maximize his talent.

Undersized, but has enough upside to become a solid nickel back and special teams contributor.

Has the talent to become a starter but must become more aggressive and make more plays.

Surprisingly physical for his size (5-9) but needs to refine his footwork, particularly his backpedal.

Raw small-school prospect. Will need to start as fourth or fifth cornerback and work his way up.

Has the skills to be a solid starter but must improve his backpedal to hold up in man coverage.

Needs to work on fundamentals, but his punt return skills will land him a spot on some team's roster.

SLEEPER

Derrick

Roberson. He has enough top-end speed to stay with receivers all over the field. He'll probably become a quality starter, but it won't happen overnight.

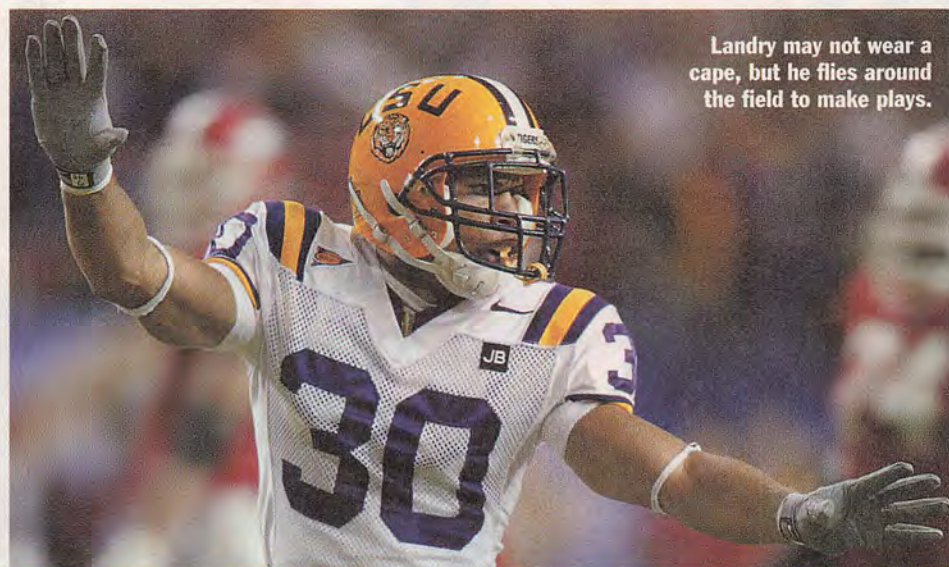
S

POSITION
STRENGTH **A**

FIRST ROUND

1 LaRon Landry
LSU, 6-0½, 213, 4.37†

Excels in all types of coverage. Gets outside quickly to make interceptions or break up passes. Consistently reads plays correctly and reacts quickly. Has elite speed and changes



Landry may not wear a cape, but he flies around the field to make plays.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

direction with burst. Delivers violent hits but sometimes launches himself and misses tackles. Flies upfield in run support and moves well through traffic. Will become a great NFL safety.

2 Reggie Nelson*
Florida, 5-11 $\frac{3}{8}$, 198, 4.35

Gets a quick jump on deep outside passes and shows the explosive burst to deliver hard hits. Doesn't misread plays. Reacts in a blink. Solid in coverage. Always seems to make big plays at crunch time; has excellent hands and good leaping ability. Aggressive in run support, sometimes overly so. Could man either safety position.

3 Brandon Meriweather
Miami, 5-10 $\frac{5}{8}$, 195, 4.48

Smooth in coverage; can cover tight ends and receivers man-to-man. A ballhawk who makes tough interceptions. Gets great jumps and closes quicker than his 40 time would indicate. Carries out assignments and makes open-field tackles. Lacks size; can be run over by ballcarriers. Could start at either safety spot and play nickel back.

SECOND ROUND

4 Aaron Rouse
Virginia Tech, 6-4, 223, 4.59

Better in run support than most safeties. Has good size, instincts and the speed to chase down runners. A catch-and-grab tackler. In coverage, breaks quickly to get outside and help on deep routes. Can lose a step when forced to turn and run. Has outstanding hands. Will be a solid NFL safety and locker room presence.

5 Eric Weddle
Utah, 5-11 $\frac{1}{4}$, 203, 4.49

Versatile; played well at cornerback and safety in college but isn't athletic enough to play corner

SLEEPER

Dashon Goldson.

His willingness to move between cornerback and safety in college helped his versatility but stunted his development as a safety.

DAY 2 PROSPECTS

10. Dashon Goldson Washington

11. Melvin Bullitt Texas A&M

12. Craig Dahl North Dakota State

13. Gerald Alexander Boise State

14. Daren Stone Maine

15. Marvin White TCU

16. Brannon Condren Troy

17. Brandon McDonald Memphis

18. Sabby Piscitelli Oregon State

19. Michael Johnson Arizona

20. Patrick Ghee Wake Forest

21. Jeremy Burnett South Florida

Lacks the speed to play cornerback, where he was productive in college, but has the size to play safety.

Has the skills to be a productive safety but must be more consistent in coverage.

A raw prospect who shows the toughness and competitiveness necessary to maximize his physical gifts.

Willing to be a physical force against both the run and pass, but his technique needs work.

Has the speed to cover tight ends man-to-man but is too passive in run support and needs to add bulk.

Possesses good physical skills but could struggle to grasp the NFL's complicated defensive schemes.

Small-school prospect looks the part when he's aggressive making plays, but inconsistency is a concern.

Versatile enough to play safety or corner but must add bulk to deal with the physical blockers in the NFL.

Looks like a linebacker but has the temperament of a safety. Versatile enough to play several roles.

A ballhawk with good instincts. Not a big hitter but could become a long-term starter.

Smart and physical player but doesn't make enough plays to be more than an NFL backup.

Could be a nice backup but will be out of the NFL fast if he doesn't become a more sound tackler.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

SNAPSHOT

with Reggie Nelson

The kind of defense I fit best in is:

Something like they run in Baltimore. They do some good stuff with Ed Reed. I could do a lot of those same things.

The NFL player I am most like is: John

Lynch. I've always liked him and tried to pattern my style of play after him. He's a hard hitter who's always around the ball.

The first thing I'll buy after I sign my contract will be: I'll probably just find a place to rest my head. I really don't get caught up in a lot of that kind of stuff.

in the NFL. A ballhawk who reacts quickly to passes and makes game-changing plays. Lacks great size, which hinders his ability to be a punishing tackler. Can return kicks. Will become a solid starter and special teams contributor.

6 Michael Griffin
Texas, 5-11 $\frac{1}{8}$, 201, 4.40

Can play close to the line, take on linemen and make tackles. Has the size to be a hard hitter but needs to improve his tackling technique. Has good speed and agility. Lacks instincts and often gets caught flat-footed in the open field. Will be a starter early on but will be terribly inconsistent.

7 Kevin Payne
Louisiana-Monroe, 6-0 $\frac{1}{4}$, 209, 4.53

Lacks top athleticism but shows the instincts to sniff out plays. Excels at sifting through traffic. Has great range and makes sound tackles. Not aggressive against the run. Sometimes stays upright in pursuit and overruns the play. Will struggle in man coverage against slot receivers. Could have an immediate impact at strong safety and on coverage units.


THIRD ROUND

8 Josh Gattis
Wake Forest, 6-1, 206, 4.52

Has good size and a strong lower body. Shows great awareness. Delivers violent hits but sometimes gets overaggressive and misses tackles. Often takes bad angles to the ballcarrier. Has the speed to stay with most receivers downfield. Drops some easy interceptions. Will be a solid free safety once he cleans up minor flaws in his technique and recognition.

9 John Wendling
Wyoming, 6-1 $\frac{1}{4}$, 222, 4.48

Physical in coverage. Can cover tight ends man-to-man but lacks the athleticism to stay with wideouts on the outside consistently. A solid tackler with the range to make plays. Lacks a smooth transition out of his backpedal. Not a game-breaker but a solid safety with the versatility to cover slot receivers.

 Get the latest draft scoops, seven-round mock draft updates and live draft coverage and analysis in the Pro Football War Room at sportingnews.com/nfl/warroom.

>> Brandon Meriweather has started games at free and strong safety, left and right cornerback and nickel back. >>>

Teams listed in first-round order



1st pick Oakland

RAIDERS

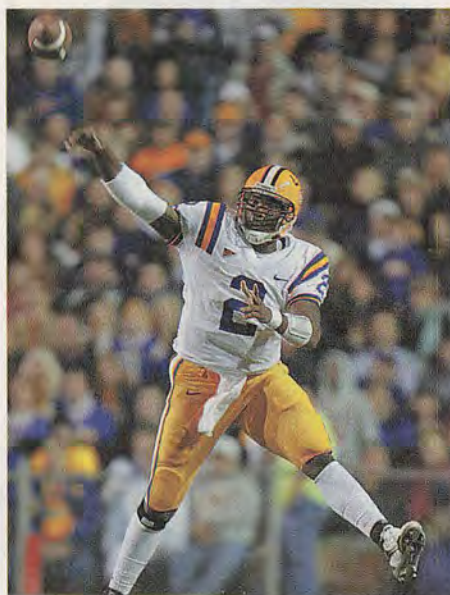
TEAM NEEDS

QB
OT
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WR
DE
DT
OLB
RB
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PR
ILB
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FB
CB
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P
LS
KR

DECISION MAKER: Owner **Al Davis** consults scouts and coaches, but he ultimately decides which players the Raiders select—and the draft has been his baby for more than 40 years. He's a proponent of taking the best players available, especially those with speed.

DRAFT BUZZ: Team officials have met with Georgia Tech WR **Calvin Johnson** and the Raiders are scheduled to talk to LSU QB **JaMarcus Russell** and other candidates for the top overall pick, but they are listening to trade proposals for the No. 1 selection. Whether they sign a veteran quarterback as insurance in case **Andrew Walter** struggles will determine whether they take Russell or Johnson or trade out of the No. 1 spot. Needs on offense will dictate the early picks, and count on Davis to pull off at least one trade.

TARGETING: The team is bent on addressing the quarterback situation. Walter is the projected starter—**Aaron Brooks** and **Marques Tuiasosopo**



ALEX BRANDON / AP

If Oakland keeps the top pick, Russell likely will be the new face of Raider Nation.

are gone. If the Raiders keep the No. 1 pick, look for them to select Russell, who can stand in the pocket, take a hit and make throws most quarterbacks can't—a trait Davis covets for the Raiders' offense, which features lots of downfield

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	1	JaMarcus Russell	QB	LSU
2	33	Joe Staley	OT	C. Michigan
3	65	Anthony Spencer	DE	Purdue
3	99	Quincy Black	LB	New Mexico
4	100	Martrez Milner	TE	Georgia
5	138	Yamon Figurs	WR	Kansas State
5	165	Quinn Pitcock	DT	Ohio State
6	175	Leroy Harris	C	N.C. State
7	211	Derrick Roberson	CB	Rutgers
7	254	Michael DePriest	WR	TCU

passes. If they trade the pick, they could target Stanford's **Trent Edwards** in the second or third round. The team has plenty of other needs, too. Offensive tackle has been unstable, so Central Michigan's **Joe Staley** would make sense in the second. Purdue DE **Anthony Spencer** is a possibility with one of the two third-round picks; he'd complement **Derrick Burgess**. New Mexico ILB **Quincy Black** had an impressive Combine, and Davis won't hesitate to take a chance on a raw player with such potential. Georgia TE **Martrez Milner** would be worth a gamble in the fourth—he could push for a starting job right away. The team also will target a run-stopping tackle and a receiver. —*Steve Corkran*



2nd pick Detroit

LIONS

TEAM NEEDS

DE
ILB
CB
S
WR
OT
TE
FB
QB
KR
PR
DT
OLB
RB
G
C
K
P
LS

DECISION MAKERS: President **Matt Millen** makes the final call but will get significant input from coach **Rod Marinelli**. Because they share a philosophy regarding the type of players the team needs, Millen is more inclined to give Marinelli the benefit of the doubt than he was with previous coaches.

DRAFT BUZZ: Millen wants to trade down from No. 2 because the team needs defensive players and the top of the draft is heavy on offense. There is talk the Lions will trade backup QB **Josh McCown** to Oakland. If they did, though, the Raiders would be more inclined to pass on LSU QB **JaMarcus Russell** and take a player the Lions are more interested in. Just because Millen has drafted receivers who turned out to be busts doesn't mean he won't take Georgia Tech's **Calvin Johnson**. He'll make decisions based on what he thinks is best for the team rather than what seems best for his image.



GEORGE FREY / AP

Beck could be the next apprentice—without ever having to face The Donald.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	2	Gaines Adams	DE	Clemson
2	34	Justin Durant	ILB	Hampton
3	66	John Beck	QB	BYU
4	101	Marcus Hamilton	CB	Virginia
5	139	Gerald Alexander	S	Boise State
5	145	Derek Stanley	WR	Wis.-Whitewater
5	154	Antwan Applewhite	DE	San Diego St.
5	158	Le'Ron McClain	FB	Alabama
7	255	Rodney Hannah	TE	Houston

TARGETING: The cover 2 scheme needs a consistent pass rush from the front four so the linebackers can be a big factor in coverage. That's why the Lions will seek the best pass rusher in the draft: Clemson DE **Gaines Adams**, who has the burst and explosive first step to beat tackles on the edge. The Lions don't have a reliable middle linebacker and would love to add Mississippi's **Patrick Willis** with their second pick, but they'd have to trade up from No. 34 to

get him. If they can't land Willis, they could target Hampton's **Justin Durant** with the pick. He has the aggressiveness and burst to the ball to fit in the cover 2. In later rounds, the team will look for corners who have a nasty streak and instincts for zone coverage. Alabama State's **Michael Coe** and Louisiana-Monroe's **Chaz Williams** are options. In fact, the Lions could take multiple corners. If they deal McCown, they could get a quarterback—perhaps BYU's **John Beck** or Stanford's **Trent Edwards**—for coordinator **Mike Martz** to groom. —*Tom Kowalski*

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a Marine's face, focusing on the right side. The Marine is wearing a black leather garrison cap with a gold-colored emblem. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the skin and the details of the uniform. The background is dark and out of focus.

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3rd pick Cleveland

BROWNS

TEAM NEEDS

CB
G
DE
DT
PR
OT
QB
RB
OLB
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ILB
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KR
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LS

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Phil Savage** and director of player personnel **Bill Rees** get plenty of input from veteran scout **T.J. McCreight**. Coach **Romeo Crennel** and his assistants can make their cases, but Savage makes the call. He tends to draft based on need.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team is unsettled at quarterback, and Savage loves LSU's **JaMarcus Russell**. But Russell likely won't be available at No. 3, and Savage is reluctant to trade up for him. He is willing to trade down for an extra pick or two but no more than a few spots. That's because he wants the option of drafting Georgia Tech WR **Calvin Johnson**, Wisconsin OT **Joe Thomas** or Oklahoma RB **Adrian Peterson**. Notre Dame QB **Brady Quinn** can't be ruled out, either.

TARGETING: Of the players likely to be available at No. 3, Peterson might make the most sense because he could make the quickest impact. **Jamal Lewis** is signed for only one year, so if the Browns don't take Peterson, they need to target a back later in the draft. The Browns were dragged down by cornerback issues in 2006—and it's imperative they find a cover man. UNLV's **Eric Wright**, who would be able to help right away as a nickel back, makes sense in Round 2. Cal's **Daymeion Hughes** has less upside but is another option. Even with the additions of E **Robaire Smith** and NT **Shaun Smith**, the team must add depth on the defensive line.

The Browns are high on Tennessee DT **Justin Harrel**—a second-round possibility—but they could address the position on Day 2. If the team doesn't draft a quarterback early, it could add Stanford's **Trent Edwards** after Round 2. Edwards might have better potential to read defenses than incumbent **Charlie Frye**. Michigan State's **Drew Stanton** is another intriguing possibility. Savage also will target guards in the middle rounds. Purdue's **Uche Nwaneri** (6-3, 325) has the size, strength and athleticism the team wants. Akron's **Andy Alleman** is more talented but has less experience. —*Steve Doerschuk*

Edwards could interest Cleveland late on Day 1.



War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	3	Joe Thomas	OT	Wisconsin
2	36	Eric Wright	CB	UNLV
3	67	Trent Edwards	QB	Stanford
4	103	Uche Nwaneri	G	Purdue
5	140	Andy Alleman	G	Akron
6	178	Kelly Talavou	DT	Utah
7	213	Ahmad Bradshaw	RB	Marshall



4th pick Tampa Bay

BUCCANEERS

TEAM NEEDS

DT
DE
OT
S
WR
C
G
FB
RB
KR
PR
TE
QB
OLB
ILB
CB
K
P
LS

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Bruce Allen** has final say, but scouts provide plenty of input and the team pretty much follows its draft board. When there is a debate, especially about a player on offense, Allen defers to coach **Jon Gruden**.

DRAFT BUZZ: Talk of the team's trading up to ensure it gets Georgia Tech WR **Calvin Johnson** will continue until draft day. So will talk of the Bucs' trading down. With

the fourth overall pick and two second-round choices, they have options. The most likely scenario is for them to parlay a second- and a third-round pick into another first-rounder. Ignore the rumor that the team will use a high pick on another young quarterback; that won't happen. The Bucs' needs are a left tackle, pass rushers, a center and depth at safety.

TARGETING: The team might not move up to get Johnson—but it certainly won't pass on him if he's available at No. 4. He's the best athlete in the draft and would alleviate the need to rely on WR **Michael Clayton**, who is coming off back-to-back disappointing years. DEs **Simeon Rice**, **Kevin Carter** and **Greg Spires** all will be 33 or older this season, so the team needs a young pass rusher. Clemson DE **Gaines Adams** is a first-round option, but the draft is deep enough at the position that the team could wait and go after Michigan's **LaMarr Woodley** in the second round. The defensive line also needs an upgrade at tackle, and N.C. State's **DeMarcus "Tank" Tyler** is a second-round possibility. Bucs coaches worked one-on-one with him at the Senior Bowl. The free-agent signing of LT **Luke Petitgout** doesn't preclude the team from drafting Wisconsin's **Joe Thomas** at No. 4. If it doesn't take Thomas, tackle could be addressed later with Central Michigan's **Joe Staley**. The Bucs also need a center, and they could use a first-day pick on Boston College's **Josh Beekman** or USC's **Ryan Kalil**. —*Roy Cummings*



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

The Bucs might hand the pass-rushing torch to Woodley.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	4	Calvin Johnson	WR	Georgia Tech
2	35	DeMarcus Tyler	DT	N.C. State
2	64	LaMarr Woodley	DE	Michigan
3	68	Brian Leonard	FB	Rutgers
4	102	Gabe Hall	OT	Texas Tech
5	141	Daren Stone	S	Maine
7	214	Erik Robertson	G	California
7	245	Scott Chandler	TE	Iowa
7	246	Darius Walker	RB	Notre Dame

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES



5th pick Arizona

CARDINALS

TEAM NEEDS

OT
OLB
CB
DE
DT
TE
RB
G
PR
KR
C
FB
ILB
S
QB
WR
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LS

DECISION MAKERS: With **Dennis Green** gone, vice president of football operations **Rod Graves** again will have the most say—and his record is spotty. New coach **Ken Whisenhunt** and director of college scouting **Steve Keim** will have considerable influence. **DRAFT BUZZ:** Shortly after getting hired, Whisenhunt made a presentation to the team's scouts in which he outlined the kind of player he wants at each position. It was much appreciated because the scouts haven't had such a clear vision under past regimes. It's more likely the Cardinals will trade down than up because they have plenty of holes and only six picks. But the team doesn't want to trade out of the top 10 because it believes there is a distinct drop-off in talent after that.

TARGETING: Though Whisenhunt says **Oliver Ross** or **Mike Gandy** can play left tackle adequately, Wisconsin's **Joe Thomas** could excel at

the position for the next 10 years. He would be the best fit for the team. Another option is Oklahoma RB **Adrian Peterson**. The team already has **Edgerrin James**, but Whisenhunt wants to run the ball at least 550 times and needs another good back to do that. Peterson would provide a big-play threat. The team could go in one of several directions with its second-round pick. Florida State OLB **Lawrence Timmons** would be a steal if he were available, and Arizona State TE **Zach Miller** has great all-around tools. Another possibility is Cal's **Daymeion Hughes**, who could help solve the team's depth issue at cornerback. The Cardinals' second-day picks in recent years haven't produced, and that needs to change. Whisenhunt has great confidence in offensive line coach **Russ Grimm**'s ability to develop players, and Missouri Southern T **Allen Barbre** could be Grimm's next project. The team needs to develop young pass rushers, too. Georgia DE **Quentin Moses** is a Day 2 option. —*Kent Somers*

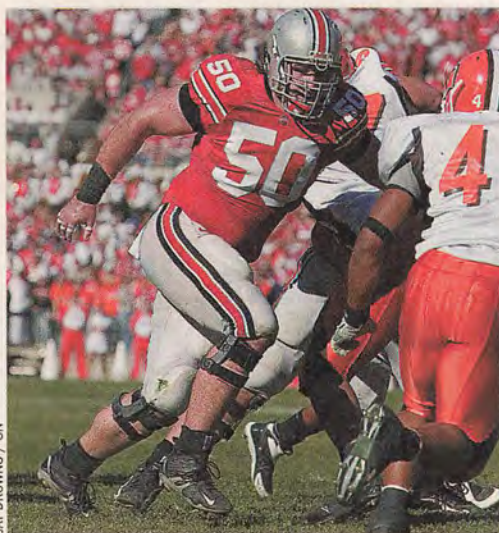
Moses is undersized, but he can get to the quarterback.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	5	Adrian Peterson	RB	Oklahoma
2	38	Lawrence Timmons	OLB	Florida State
3	69	David Irons	CB	Auburn
4	105	Allen Barbre	OT	Mo. Southern
5	142	Mansfield Wrotto	G	Georgia Tech
7	215	Ola Dagunduro	DT	Nebraska



JAY DROWNS / SN

Datish is a grinder who has enough tools to make him a worthy Day 2 developmental pick.



6th pick Washington

REDSKINS

TEAM NEEDS

DT
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WR
OLB
DE
CB
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ILB
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DECISION MAKERS: Every decision goes through coach **Joe Gibbs**. In the first round, he favors safe picks over high-risk, high-reward selections and is inclined to go with defensive players. **DRAFT BUZZ:** The team has only one Day 1 pick, so it won't be able to move up to get Georgia Tech WR **Calvin Johnson**—unless it offers its 2008 first-round selection. Johnson's game-breaking ability might tempt Gibbs to do just that. Conventional wisdom has the Redskins taking a defensive lineman at No. 6 overall. But because none of the top D-line prospects is flawless and the team lacks picks, it could try to move down and pick up another first-day selection.

TARGETING: The team needs a run-stopping, space-eating defensive tackle, and the safest bet is Michigan's **Alan Branch**, who could start immediately. Branch is huge (6-5½, 324) and was productive at a big-time program.

He didn't have a great predraft workout, however, which could spur the team to take Georgia DE **Charles Johnson** or Louisville DT **Amobi Okoye**. Johnson is a high-effort player who could develop into an excellent run stuffer. Okoye, 19, has tremendous upside and is one of the most intriguing players in the draft. The team will look for a developmental offensive lineman on Day 2. Ohio State G **Doug Datish** is not the complete package, but he's smart, tough and versatile. The team could take a wide receiver—one who also can play special teams—with one of its two sixth-round picks. UCLA's **Junior Taylor** has potential, but a knee injury he suffered in 2005 would give the club pause. Hampton's **Marquay McDaniel** has decent size and was highly productive at a small college. The team could take a quarterback in the sixth or seventh round. UTEP's **Jordan Palmer** must improve his footwork, but he has excellent size (6-5, 235) and a strong arm. —*Paul Woody*

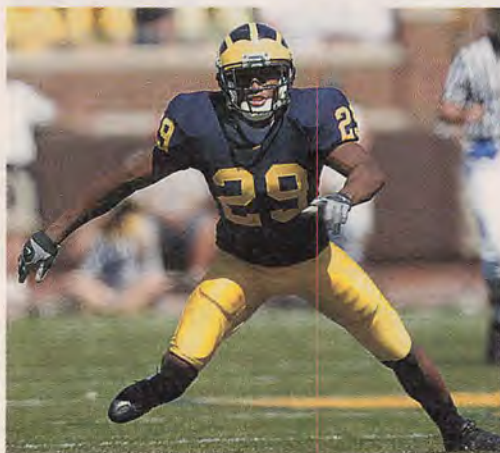
War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	6	Alan Branch	DT	Michigan
5	143	Doug Datish	G	Ohio State
6	179	C.J. Ah You	DE	Oklahoma
6	205	Junior Taylor	WR	UCLA
7	216	Patrick Ghee	S	Wake Forest

>> The Redskins have made just 29 selections the past five years, the fewest in that span. They also have the fewest this year (five). >>>

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	7	Leon Hall	CB	Michigan
2	41	Robert Meachem	WR	Tennessee
3	72	Victor Abiamiri	DE	Notre Dame
4	106	Drew Stanton	QB	Michigan State
5	146	Lorenzo Booker	RB	Florida State
6	182	Chansi Stuckey	WR	Clemson
7	217	Aaron Brant	OT	Iowa State



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Hall may not be the Vikings' preferred pick, but he might be the best prospect available at No. 7.



7th pick Minnesota

VIKINGS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
DE
QB
ILB
CB
DT
KR
G
OT
FB
P
OLB
C
TE
S
K
PR
LS

DECISION MAKERS: New VP of player personnel **Rick Spielman** has the final say, but he will work in concert with coach **Brad Childress**. The club also values the opinion of director of college scouting **Scott Studwell**.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team's commitment to rebuilding through the draft suggests that it will try to trade down from the seventh pick and pick up more choices. The Vikings need help at multiple positions, and Spielman has touted his history of amassing extra picks through trades. The potential for trading down will increase if Notre Dame QB **Brady Quinn** is available at No. 7. The team likes Quinn but seems committed to **Tarvaris Jackson**. It could net several picks from a team looking to move up to draft Quinn.

TARGETING: The Vikings want to add multiple receivers, though they are unlikely to take one with the seventh pick after

striking out on **Troy Williamson** in 2005. The position is deep this year, so the Vikings can get value in the second round and beyond. Tennessee WR **Robert Meachem** is a strong possibility in Round 2. LSU's **Dwayne Bowe** and South Carolina's **Sidney Rice** are other first-day options. The Vikings can fill their need for a pass rusher if Clemson DE **Gaines Adams** slips to the seventh pick. Notre Dame DL **Victor Abiamiri**, a natural playmaker, is an option late on Day 1. If Adams is gone and they can't trade down, the Vikings will take the best available player at No. 7, which could wind up being Michigan CB **Leon Hall**. The team likely will pursue a developmental quarterback on Day 2. Coastal Carolina's **Tyler Thigpen** and Michigan State's **Drew Stanton** are possibilities. A Day 2 priority will be adding depth in the offensive backfield. Houston's **Jackie Battle** is 235 pounds but runs a 4.42 40. He could provide depth behind RB **Chester Taylor** and FB **Tony Richardson**. —Kevin Seifert



8th pick Atlanta

FALCONS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
S
G
DE
CB
ILB
C
DT
OT
OLB
K
KR
PR
TE
P
LS
RB
QB
FB

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Rich McKay** likes to have a consensus among the key members of the organization, including senior personnel executive **Billy Devaney** and director of football operations **Nick Polk**. McKay helped build the Buccaneers into Super Bowl champions, but his record in Atlanta has been underwhelming.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team has 10 picks—including two second-rounders—and wouldn't mind adding more as it tries to find the right players to fit in coach **Bobby Petrino**'s offensive system. He has scrapped the cut-blocking scheme and is seeking bigger linemen who can get a push up front and allow QB **Michael Vick** time to set up in the pocket. On defense, with **Patrick Kerney** gone and **John Abraham** struggling with injuries, look for the team to pick an end early.

TARGETING: In trading QB **Matt Schaub** to the Texans, the Falcons moved to the No. 8

spot—and it's unlikely they will let LSU's **LaRon Landry** get past them. He is an impact safety who has speed, coverage skills and striking ability. If Landry is off the board, look for the team to move down and land Florida S **Reggie Nelson**, who excels in coverage. Defensive end and wideout could be addressed next. Hawaii E **Ikaika Alama-Francis** is an explosive player with star potential. The team hasn't had much luck drafting receivers under McKay, but it likely will try again. The Falcons figure to have a shot at South Carolina's **Sidney Rice**, USC's **Dwayne Jarrett** or Ohio State's **Anthony Gonzalez** in Round 2. Each could push the current starters or be a fine No. 3 target. Rice didn't dazzle scouts at the Combine but always seems to come down with the ball in traffic. Jarrett and Gonzalez had highly productive college careers. In the middle rounds, expect the Falcons to address the offensive and defensive lines. Look for them to add another wideout on the second day. —D. Orlando Ledbetter



RONEN ZILBERMAN / AP

Alama-Francis has the type of star power the Falcons could use as they reload at defensive end.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	8	LaRon Landry	S	LSU
2	39	Ikaika Alama-Francis	DE	Hawaii
2	44	Sidney Rice	WR	South Carolina
3	75	Jonathan Wade	CB	Tennessee
4	109	Brandon Frye	T	Virginia Tech
4	121	Trey Lewis	DT	Washburn
4	133	Manuel Ramirez	G	Texas Tech
5	149	Johnnie Lee Higgins	WR	UTEP
6	185	Jackie Battle	RB	Houston
7	244	Toby Korrodi	QB	C. Missouri



9th pick Miami

DOLPHINS

TEAM NEEDS

QB
G
OT
S
WR
KR
PR
TE
CB
RB
C
DE
OLB
DT
ILB
FB
P
LS
K

DECISION MAKERS: After serving as a glorified scout under former coach Nick Saban, G.M. Randy Mueller is back in control. He and new coach Cam Cameron will work together on personnel decisions. Look for them to focus on adding speed to the roster.

DRAFT BUZZ: LSU QB JaMarcus Russell and Notre Dame QB Brady Quinn might be out of the team's reach, but Mueller and Cameron traveled to visit the two anyway. The team loves Quinn and might be willing to trade up to get him. The team also is expected to continue to try to land Chiefs QB Trent Green. Miami and Kansas City reached a stalemate in negotiations, but the Chiefs could reduce their demands as draft day nears.

TARGETING: Quarterback is the team's most glaring single need, but the offensive line is the unit that needs the most attention. The team allowed five linemen to leave as free agents and has signed only G Chris Liwinski (to be a starter) and OT Mike Rosenthal (to compete for a job). Cameron believes the line can be competitive with the right rookies in place, but to find the right rookies, the Dolphins

will need to draft a lot of them—they could select as many as four, starting as early as Round 1 (if they acquire Green or Quinn is unavailable with the ninth pick). Penn State OT Levi Brown is an option, as is a second-round package of two Boston College players: C/G Josh Beekman and OT James Marten. Beekman has the quick feet Mueller likes, and he's versatile enough to fill one of the many vacancies along the line. It's unclear who will play left tackle, and the massive Marten (6-7½, 310) would give Miami another option. If the Dolphins don't draft Quinn or acquire Green, they could go after Michigan State QB Drew Stanton in the third or fourth round. A wide receiver or two and smart players for the secondary will be among the targets in the middle and late rounds. —Jeff Darlington



PAUL NISELY / SN

Stanton might have a hand in fixing Miami's QB problem.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	9	Brady Quinn	QB	Notre Dame
2	40	Josh Beekman	C/G	Boston College
2	60	James Marten	OT	Boston College
3	71	Josh Gattis	S	Wake Forest
4	108	Brian Robison	DE	Texas
6	181	James Jones	WR	San Jose State
6	199	Mark Fenton	C	Colorado
7	219	Jonny Harline	TE	BYU
7	238	Chaz Williams	CB	La.-Monroe



10th pick Houston

TEXANS

TEAM NEEDS

OT
WR
S
DE
DT
CB
OLB
G
C
QB
FB
ILB
TE
KR
PR
K
P
LS

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. Rick Smith will have the final say, but he'll work closely with coach Gary Kubiak to find players who fit the system.

DRAFT BUZZ: Despite salary cap limitations, the Texans were aggressive when pursuing free agents, and they signed players to fill the team's biggest needs. By acquiring RB Ahman Green, OLBs Danny Clark and Shawn Barber, CB Jamar Fletcher, OT Jordan Black and DT Jeff Zgonina to plug obvious holes, the Texans have given themselves the flexibility to take the best available player in almost every round. Houston dealt its second-round pick to Atlanta in the trade for QB Matt Schaub, so it will listen to draft-day trade proposals that will allow it to gain a few more selections.

TARGETING: The Texans' top two priorities are finding an offensive tackle to help protect Schaub and a No. 2 wide receiver to complement Andre Johnson. The draft is deep at receiver, so Penn State OT Levi Brown is a likely target at No. 10. The Texans' horrible offensive line play took a great toll on former QB David Carr, and the team doesn't want to make the same mistake with Schaub. Brown could be the long-term solution to protect Schaub's blind side. If the team goes with a wide receiver in the third round, Virginia Tech's David Clowney, a playmaker with good speed and great hands, or Lane's Jacoby Jones, an explosive athlete who is more of a project, likely will be available. Texas A&M S Melvin Bullitt is an option in the fourth round. He's a hard-hitting, physical tackler who is better against the run than the pass, which is what the Texans need. Central Michigan DE Dan Bazuin and Georgia DE Quentin Moses are other fourth-round options. Both are strong, hard-nosed players with the ability to rush the passer. Moses is more athletic, but he also is more inconsistent.

—Megan Manfull

Clowney could play second fiddle in the Texans' receiving unit.



BOB LEVERONE / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	10	Levi Brown	OT	Penn State
3	73	David Clowney	WR	Virginia Tech
4	107	Dan Bazuin	DE	C. Michigan
5	144	Marvin White	S	TCU
6	183	Lyle Sendlein	C	Texas
7	218	Turk McBride	DT	Tennessee

>> Brady Quinn will be the first first-round quarterback out of Notre Dame since Rick Mirer in 1993. >>



11th pick San Francisco

49ERS

TEAM NEEDS

DE
WR
DT
OLB
CB
ILB
S
OT
G
C
PR
RB
FB
TE
QB
KR
LS
P
K

DECISION MAKERS: Vice president of player personnel **Scot McCloughan** does the homework and makes recommendations, but coach **Mike Nolan** has the final say on draft day. Chances are Nolan won't overrule his personnel chief, who urged Nolan to take RB **Frank Gore** in 2005.

DRAFT BUZZ: With eight picks in the first four rounds, the 49ers have some ammunition if they want to trade up. The team will continue to look for players who fit in the 3-4 defense Nolan prefers. Injuries and personnel issues forced him to use a 4-3 base scheme his first two years.

TARGETING: After signing four new starters on defense—CB **Nate Clements**, OLB **Tully Banta-Cain**, NT **Aubrayo**

Franklin and S **Michael Lewis**—the team has the freedom to take the best available player. Still, the makeover of the defense is not complete, so the 49ers will consider drafting a lineman with the 11th overall pick. Arkansas E **Jamaal Anderson** would boost the pass rush and also



MICHAEL MCNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

Gonzalez is one of several tantalizing receiver options the 49ers could pursue in Round 2.

has the strength to help in run support. Nebraska E **Adam Carriker** would help the transition to the 3-4 because he has the size and strength to stop the run and can slide inside on

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	11	Jamaal Anderson	DE	Arkansas
2	42	Steve Smith	WR	USC
3	76	Ryan Kalil	C	USC
3	97	John Wendling	S	Wyoming
4	104	Kareem Brown	DT	Miami
4	110	Dashon Goldson	S	Washington
4	124	Laurent Robinson	WR	Illinois State
4	135	Doug Free	OT	Northern Illinois
5	147	Dallas Sartz	OLB	USC
6	186	Tony Hunt	RB	Penn State

passing downs. Another first-round option is ILB **Patrick Willis**, who made a strong impression on 49ers coaches at the Senior Bowl. He could be groomed to replace **Derek Smith**, 32. Despite the addition of free-agent pickup **Ashley Lelie**, wide receiver also will be a high priority. If the team waits until the second round for a wideout, Tennessee's **Robert Meachem**, USC's **Steve Smith**, Ohio State's **Anthony Gonzalez** and LSU's **Craig Davis** are possibilities. The team will use its abundance of third- and fourth-round picks to shore up depth, particularly in the secondary and on the offensive line. The team also could add another receiver and will want to get bigger on the defensive line. —Dennis Georgatos



12th pick Buffalo

BILLS

TEAM NEEDS

RB
ILB
CB
OLB
WR
FB
TE
QB
C
OT
G
DT
S
DE
LS
K
KR
PR
P

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Marv Levy** has the final say on all picks, but he believes in reaching a consensus with his scouts and coaches. He focuses on high-character, self-motivated players.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Bills would like to address their need at running back before the draft. They have shown serious interest in restricted free agent **Michael Turner** but have been unwilling to meet the Chargers' asking price. One of their draft goals will be to find defensive players who fit their scheme. They want linebackers who are fast and attack the line and cornerbacks who can play man and zone coverage

TARGETING: The Bills need a running back, a linebacker and a cornerback—and it's debatable which position should be addressed first. They would love to see Oklahoma RB **Adrian Peterson** fall to them at No. 12, but that's unlikely. Cal's **Marshawn Lynch** would be a great fit, and he likely will

be available. If Mississippi ILB **Patrick Willis** is around at No. 12, the team might not be able to pass him up. He's just what the Bills need—an athletic player who can attack the line. If Willis is gone, the team could trade down for Penn State's **Paul Posluszny** or Florida State's **Lawrence Timmons**. With the departure of **Nate Clements**, the Bills don't have a top cover corner. They might consider Michigan's **Leon Hall**, but the position is deep and Cal's **Daymeion Hughes** would be a good value pick in the second round. There also will be starting-caliber running backs available after the first round; Ohio State's **Antonio Pittman**, Arizona's **Chris Henry** and Auburn's **Kenny Irons** are possibilities. The Bills are fairly deep at receiver, but they lack a playmaker with size. Lane College's **Jacoby Jones** (6-2½, 210) would be a good developmental pick in the third round. On Day 2, the team will focus on building depth, and it could target a linebacker, a fullback and an offensive lineman. —Allen Wilson



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

The Bills have a gaping hole at running back; luckily for them, Lynch will be available to fill it.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	12	Marshawn Lynch	RB	California
2	43	Daymeion Hughes	CB	California
3	74	H.B. Blades	MLB	Pitt
3	92	Jacoby Jones	WR	Lane College
4	111	Rory Johnson	OLB	Mississippi
6	184	Charles Harris	OT	Washington St.
7	222	Sam Olajubutu	OLB	Arkansas
7	239	Jeremy Burnett	S	South Florida

Leonard is the type of big back the Rams could fall for on draft day.



PAUL NISELY / SN



13th pick St. Louis

RAMS

TEAM NEEDS

DT
RB
KR
PR
DE
CB
WR
C
G
FB
ILB
OLB
P
S
OT
QB
TE
LS
K

DECISION MAKERS: The Rams give their head coaches a lot of leeway in the draft room, although team presidents **John Shaw** and **Jay Zygmunt** have veto power. **Tony Softli** now is in charge of player personnel, and it is unclear how much he will influence coach **Scott Linehan**.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Rams are expected to make a serious trade offer for Panthers DT **Kris Jenkins**, who would fill their biggest need. Acquiring Jenkins would give the team great flexibility; it's possible they then could take Ohio State WR/KR **Ted Ginn** with the 13th pick. Ginn could revive the team's return game and be groomed to replace WR **Isaac Bruce** in a year or two.

TARGETING: After finishing 31st in run defense, the Rams need a wide-body at nose tackle. If they can't land Jenkins, they'll have to find help in the draft. They seem lukewarm

toward Michigan's **Alan Branch**, who may be an underachiever. Louisville's **Amobi Okoye** (6-2, 301) is an exciting prospect but lacks the ideal size to play nose tackle. If neither player is around at No. 13, the Rams will consider Nebraska DE **Adam Carriker** and Arkansas DE **Jamaal Anderson**. Though the team acquired RE **James Hall** from the Lions, it still needs to develop an edge rusher to complement LE **Leonard Little**. Carriker has a reputation as an excellent run defender. The other top priorities are a backup for RB **Steven Jackson** and a return man if Ginn isn't the first pick. Linehan likes big backs, and Penn State's **Tony Hunt**, Arizona's **Chris Henry** and Rutgers' **Brian Leonard** all weigh 226 pounds or more. A back with return potential, such as Florida State's **Lorenzo Booker**, also could be considered. The team needs to draft an offensive tackle to groom behind starters **Orlando Pace** and **Alex Barron** and add interior line depth. —*Jim Thomas*

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	13	Amobi Okoye	DT	Louisville
2	52	Ray McDonald	DE	Florida
3	82	Kenny Irons	RB	Auburn
4	117	Enoka Lucas	C	Oregon
5	148	Herbert Taylor	OT	TCU
6	190	Ryan Smith	CB	Florida
7	225	Marquay McDaniel	WR	Hampton
7	248	Justin Warren	ILB	Texas A&M
7	249	Derek Landri	DT	Notre Dame



14th pick Carolina

PANTHERS

TEAM NEEDS

S
ILB
DE
WR
TE
PR
KR
FB
CB
OLB
OT
DT
RB
G
C
QB
K
LS
P

DECISION MAKERS: This will be the first draft with **Don Gregory** as director of college scouting, but there won't be dramatic changes. The team believes in a committee approach; Gregory will have plenty of input, but G.M. **Marty Hurney** and coach **John Fox** share the final say. In the past few years, Fox and Hurney haven't had many hits after the early rounds.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team has been very quiet in the free-agent market and has focused instead on trying to extend the contracts of WR **Steve Smith**, LE **Julius Peppers** and RT **Jordan Gross**. That means some of the draft picks will have to contribute immediately. Hurney has a history of being active on draft day, and he will explore all trade possibilities to add picks. The Panthers are shopping DT **Kris Jenkins**; he could command one or two picks in the first four rounds.

TARGETING: The team needs to address both

safety positions. It has avoided drafting safeties in the first round, but that could change if LSU's **LaRon Landry** or Florida's **Reggie Nelson** is available. **Mike Minter** is the team's only experienced safety, and he's nearing the end of his career. Middle linebacker is a huge concern because **Dan Morgan** can't stay healthy. The team might not be able to pass on Mississippi's **Patrick Willis** in the first round. Carolina could use a second- or third-round pick on an end—possibly Miami's **Baraka Atkins**—who eventually could replace **Mike Rucker**, 32. The team may use the middle rounds to pick up a receiving tight end, but it could draft a playmaking wideout/kick returner at any time. Ohio State's **Ted Ginn** is a first-round possibility for that role. Special teams will be emphasized late in the draft because the team allowed the unit's top three tacklers last season to leave. Also look for the team to add a fullback to groom as an eventual replacement for **Brad Hoover**. —*Pat Yasinskas*



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Atkins might be taking his versatility and polished pass-rush moves north to Carolina.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	14	Patrick Willis	ILB	Mississippi
2	45	Aaron Rouse	S	Virginia Tech
3	83	Baraka Atkins	DE	Miami
4	118	Troy Smith	QB	Ohio State
5	155	Brannon Condren	S	Troy
6	191	Ryan Moore	WR	Miami
7	226	Zac Herold	TE	Neb.-Omaha

>> Troy Smith played high school and college football with both 2007 prospect Ted Ginn and 2006 top 10 pick Donte Whitner. >>>



15th pick Pittsburgh

STEELERS

TEAM NEEDS

OLB
DE
RB
CB
P
OT
G
DT
ILB
FB
TE
WR
S
C
QB
K
KR
PR
LS

DECISION MAKERS: Former coach **Bill Cowher** was never overruled when he and director of football operations **Kevin Colbert** reached a stalemate on a draft pick. New coach **Mike Tomlin** likely won't have that power—yet.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Steelers, again, are expected to be willing draft-day traders, especially because they picked up a couple of midround compensatory selections. They would be wise to consider packaging picks to trade up because there is good depth on the roster—and thus not many open spots. Look for the defense to receive most of the team's attention on Day 1.

TARGETING: The Steelers probably will take an outside linebacker or defensive end in the first round. With the release of OLB **Joey Porter**, the team needs a player who can pressure the quarterback on the outside. The club isn't sure whether it will play a 3-4 or a 4-3. It will not draft players to

fit a defense; rather, it will draft the best players and fit the scheme around the personnel. One defensive end who has caught the coaches' attention is Nebraska's **Adam Carriker** (6-6, 292), who has great size and uses his hands well. Cornerback is another position that could get early attention, and Pitt's **Darrelle Revis** likely will be available when the team picks in the first round. He could develop into a big-time playmaker. If the club goes that route, it might try to trade up in the second round to land Florida State OLB **Lawrence Timmons**, who also has lined up as a defensive end. The Steelers need a running back to give **Willie Parker** a break. **Antonio Pittman** of Ohio State and **Michael Bush** of Louisville are options in the second and third rounds. Bush runs hard inside and could provide tough yards when the team shifts into ball-control mode late in games. The Steelers would like to replace **Chris Gardocki** and could take a punter on the second day. —Gerry Dulac

The Steelers could use Revis' big-play mettle.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	15	Paul Posluszny	OLB	Penn State
2	46	Antonio Pittman	RB	Ohio State
3	77	Michael Coe	CB	Alabama State
4	119	Jay Moore	DE	Nebraska
4	132	Daniel Parrish	OT	Florida A&M
5	156	Mike Jones	G	Iowa
5	170	Tim Crowder	DE	Texas
6	192	Courtney Taylor	WR	Auburn
7	227	Corey Graham	CB	New Hampshire



MATTHEW RUTZ / SN

Size? Check. Speed? Check. It looks like Irons has everything the Packers want in a running back.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	16	Ted Ginn	WR	Ohio State
2	47	Chris Henry	RB	Arizona
3	78	Ben Patrick	TE	Delaware
4	112	Travarous Bain	CB	Hampton
5	157	Mike Otto	OT	Purdue
6	193	Michael Johnson	S	Arizona
7	228	Brian Crum	OLB	Florida
7	235	Jason Snelling	FB	Virginia
7	243	Ramonce Taylor	RB	Texas College



16th pick Green Bay

PACKERS

TEAM NEEDS

RB
WR
TE
S
CB
OLB
KR
PR
FB
OT
C
DT
QB
G
K
P
DE
ILB
LS

DECISION MAKER: The buck stops with G.M. **Ted Thompson**. He believes in building his team primarily through the draft and has complete control of the draft room.

DRAFT BUZZ: Thompson never has traded up during a draft, and that's unlikely to change this year. Because there likely isn't a player Thompson *has* to have at No. 16, he surely will be talking to teams about trading down into the 20s. Adding picks isn't a high priority, though, because the Packers have made 23 selections the past two years.

TARGETING: Thompson is serious about taking the best available player regardless of position. But at some point, he'll have to address the team's lack of playmakers on offense. Cal RB **Marshawn Lynch** seems an obvious choice in the first round, but Thompson might be concerned about his character issues and ability to fit the Packers'

running game, which relies on zone blocking and cutbacks. Arizona's **Chris Henry**, Auburn's **Kenny Irons** and Florida State's **Lorenzo Booker** could be available later—and all three fit the size/speed requirements the club needs for its system. Taking a second back late in the draft is a distinct possibility. Ohio State's **Ted Ginn** is a game-changing wideout who also would help the team's anemic return game, but he needs to be more consistent as a receiver. Big wideouts such as LSU's **Dwayne Bowe** and Tennessee's **Robert Meachem** are other early-round options. If Pitt CB **Darrelle Revis** and Florida S **Reggie Nelson** are available at No. 16, the Packers will have to consider them because both could help immediately. Thompson likes his young tight ends, so he might not take one at all unless he trades down in Round 1 to select Miami's **Greg Olsen**. The Packers need to add secondary and linebacker depth in the middle rounds. If the team doesn't select Ginn, it also will need to select a returner or two. —Tom Silverstein



17th pick Jacksonville

JAGUARS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
S
DE
CB
QB
OLB
ILB
DT
G
OT
C
P
FB
KR
PR
TE
RB
K
LS

DECISION MAKERS:

Despite some so-so first-round picks, the collaboration of coach **Jack Del Rio**, vice president of player personnel **James Harris** and college scouting director **Gene Smith** has resulted in deep, productive drafts over the past four seasons.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team doesn't make many draft-related trades, but it could shop **RT Maurice Williams**

for another pick. He is scheduled to make \$3.5 million this season but lost his starting job when the team signed **Tony Pashos**. The Jaguars could take a developmental quarterback because there is uncertainty surrounding **Byron Leftwich**, who is injury-prone and entering the last year of his contract.

TARGETING: The Jaguars have taken a wide receiver in the first round two of the past three drafts. The company line is they won't do it again, but that could be a smoke screen. LSU's **Dwayne Bowe** has been compared to Steelers WR **Hines Ward** for his physical style and fearlessness working the middle of the field, and the Jags have emphasized the need to get better production from the slot. The team needs to address free safety, and Florida's **Reggie Nelson**, a big hitter, fits in its scheme because of his quick reactions and ability to cover tight ends and slot receivers man-to-man. Also, the team won't rule out a defensive end in the first round if it has a chance to take Florida's **Jarvis Moss**, Georgia's **Charles Johnson** or Nebraska's **Adam Carriker**. Moss has the speed to be an effective pass-rushing specialist, and Johnson and Carriker have the size and strength to develop into productive strongside ends. The club likely will look for its insurance for Leftwich in the third or fourth round.

Houston's **Kevin Kolb** has a strong, accurate arm and is tough. But he lacks experience in a pro-style system. With injuries and age catching up to nickel back **Terry Cousin**, the club also would like to add a corner or two later in the draft. —*Michael C. Wright*



BOB LEVERONE / SN

Moss' pass-rush prowess could prove too tempting for the Jags to ignore.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	17	Dwayne Bowe	WR	LSU
2	48	Eric Weddle	S	Utah
3	79	Kevin Kolb	QB	Houston
4	113	Quentin Moses	DE	Georgia
5	150	Calvin Bannister	CB	Hampton
6	194	Quinton Culbertson	ILB	Mississippi St.
7	229	Louis Leonard	DT	Fresno State
7	251	Brian Daniels	G	Colorado
7	252	Joel Filani	WR	Texas Tech



18th pick Cincinnati

BENGALS

TEAM NEEDS

CB
S
DT
OLB
TE
WR
OT
RB
G
ILB
DE
PR
LS
KR
QB
C
FB
K
P

DECISION MAKERS: Team owner and president **Mike Brown** has the final say on all picks, but he carefully considers input from the scouts and coaches and can be swayed by a sound argument, especially from his close friend, coach **Marvin Lewis**.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team's lack of a third-round pick—it lost the choice when it took MLB **Ahmad Brooks** in the 2006 supplemental draft—combined with WR **Chris Henry**'s eight-game suspension leaves the Bengals with too many needs and too few picks. The situation would be helped by trading DE **Justin Smith** to a team willing to give up a first- and a third-round pick. He's a good player, but his production doesn't match his sky-high salary. Trading him could give the Bengals four first-day picks and enable them to address numerous needs on the league's 30th-ranked defense.

TARGETING: CB **Johnathan Joseph** needs a running mate, and the team had planned to look for one in the first round. Because of the loss of Henry, though, the Bengals could use the 18th pick on a wideout—Ohio State's **Ted Ginn** comes to mind. Ginn's speed and burst complementing WRs **Chad Johnson** and **T.J. Houshmandzadeh** would give Cincinnati the most feared set of receivers in the league. Pitt CB **Darrelle Revis** and Arkansas CB **Chris Houston** both have the talent to start by midseason. Revis is a big hitter who is quick and smooth in coverage, and the speedy Houston has impressed the team with his physical style. Texas' **Michael Griffin**, a target in the second round, could make an impact at safety and fill in at corner. If the team can't pull off a trade for a third-round pick, the second day must yield a defensive tackle such as Oregon's **Matt Toeaina**, who can pressure quarterbacks and stop the run. The club likely will round out the draft by adding depth at offensive tackle, tight end and running back. —*Chick Ludwig*

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	18	Darrelle Revis	CB	Pitt
2	49	Michael Griffin	S	Texas
4	114	Antwan Barnes	OLB	Florida Int'l
5	151	Matt Toeaina	DT	Oregon
6	187	Brandon Myles	WR	West Virginia
7	230	Jonathan Palmer	OT	Auburn
7	253	Gary Russell	RB	Minnesota

A fast, physical corner, Houston would give Cincy another young stud in its secondary.



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

>> Kevin Kolb is one of only three quarterbacks in Division I-A history to start at least 50 games. >>>



19th pick Tennessee

TITANS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
DE
CB
RB
G
S
KR
PR
TE
DT
C
OLB
OT
ILB
QB
FB
K
P
LS

DECISION MAKERS: The departure of longtime G.M. **Floyd Reese** will allow coach **Jeff Fisher** to have more control of the Titans' decisions, but new G.M. **Mike Reinfeldt** will be putting his stamp on the organization with his first draft class.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team signed a few second-tier free agents, but departures have left the Titans with significant holes. With three extra second-day picks, the team has the ammunition to be active. The Titans could trade up to get a difference-maker to fill one of the holes; it also could make a trade or two to acquire veterans, especially at receiver. WR **Justin McCareins**, who is being shopped by the Jets, is a possibility, but the team could be enticed by anyone capable of making an immediate impact.

TARGETING: After losing **Drew Bennett** and **Bobby Wade**, its top two receivers, as free agents, the team needs playmakers at the position. Potential targets at No. 19 include LSU's **Dwayne Bowe** and Tennessee's **Robert Meachem**. If the Titans decide to upgrade the defense first, they'll look for an end. Nebraska's **Adam Carriker**

would be a good fit because of his toughness. Georgia's **Charles Johnson** is another solid first-round option. If the Titans wait until the second round to get an end, Michigan's **LaMarr Woodley** is a possibility; he has the pass-rushing skills the team desperately needs. With **Pacman Jones** suspended for the season, the Titans need help at cornerback, and they might look for someone who also can contribute in the return game. Tennessee's **Jonathan Wade** is a third-round option. He has intriguing speed, and the team likes his physical style. If the Titans don't trade for a veteran running back, they could take one in the middle rounds. In the late rounds, they'll look to add depth at several spots: the interior offensive line, safety, tight end and the defensive line. —Jim Wyatt

The Titans could grab Meachem to restock their receiving unit.



JAY DROWNS / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	20	Tanard Jackson	CB	Syracuse
2	51	Jason Hill	WR	Washington St.
3	81	Stewart Bradley	OLB	Nebraska
4	116	Craig Dahl	S	N. Dakota St.
5	153	Keith Jackson	DT	Arkansas
6	189	Clark Harris	TE	Rutgers
7	224	Jason Capizzi	OT	Indiana (Pa.)
7	250	D.D. Terry	RB	Sam Houston St.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	19	Charles Johnson	DE	Georgia
2	50	Dwayne Jarrett	WR	USC
3	80	Brandon Jackson	RB	Nebraska
4	115	Melvin Bullitt	S	Texas A&M
4	128	C.J. Wilson	CB	Baylor
5	152	Tala Esera	G	Hawaii
6	188	Ryne Robinson	WR	Miami (Ohio)
6	204	Earl Everett	LB	Florida
6	206	Tim Mixon	CB	California
7	223	Garrett Wolfe	RB	Northern Illinois



20th pick New York

GIANTS

TEAM NEEDS

OLB
CB
WR
TE
S
DT
FB
OT
DE
RB
C
K
ILB
G
P
QB
KR
PR
LS



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

It's no secret the Giants fancy Ross, who would contend for a starting job immediately.

DECISION MAKERS: New G.M. **Jerry Reese**, a scout at heart, has been an influential voice in the team's draft room for years. Coach **Tom Coughlin**'s opinions will be important, but Reese has the final word.

DRAFT BUZZ: After doing almost nothing in the free-agent market, the Giants have several holes they must fill. **Michael Strahan** and **Justin Tuck** are coming off injuries, which could cause the team to look at defensive ends more closely. The Giants have been battered by injuries in recent seasons, and Reese may focus on players who have a limited injury history. New defensive coordinator **Steve Spagnuolo** is believed to favor small, fast players because he wants to implement a blitzing, attacking system. The Giants will need to find personnel to match those needs, particularly at outside linebacker.

TARGETING: The team needs help at every position on defense except middle linebacker. On offense, the primary need is a big receiver, but the Giants also could use a backup tight end and a young lineman (preferably a tackle). The No. 1 priority is at outside linebacker, where untested **Gerris Wilkinson** and converted MLB **Kawika Mitchell** are the projected starters. If the Giants use the 20th overall

pick on a linebacker, they could select Miami's **Jon Beason**, Penn State's **Paul Posluszny** or Florida State's **Lawrence Timmons**. One of their favorite players on the board is Texas CB **Aaron Ross**, who could push both **Corey Webster** and **Sam Madison** for a starting job. If Ross isn't available, Syracuse's **Tanard Jackson** could be the guy. The Giants also like USC's **Dwayne Jarrett**—a big, productive receiver. Jarrett could provide insurance for **Amani Toomer**, who is recovering from a torn ACL. On Day 2, the team will look to add a safety, a defensive tackle and a blocking tight end such as Missouri Western's **Gijon Robinson**. The Giants also could add a fullback as an upgrade over **Jim Finn**. —Ralph Vacchiano



21st pick Denver

BRONCOS

TEAM NEEDS

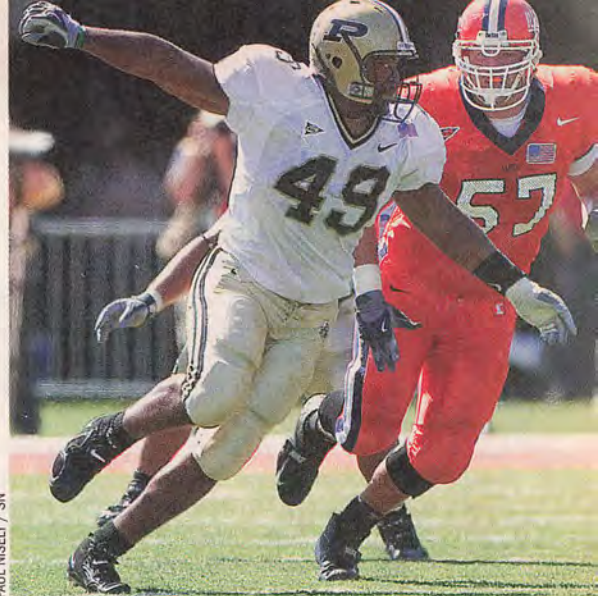
DT
DE
S
ILB
PR
OT
G
RB
P
C
KR
CB
OLB
WR
FB
QB
TE
K
LS

DECISION MAKERS: Coach **Mike Shanahan** makes the calls, but the draft is a democratic process—votes are taken and opinions are encouraged. With G.M. **Ted Sundquist** and director of player personnel **Jim Goodman**, both college scouting veterans, in the room, there is a wealth of knowledge from which to draw.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team has a history of making trades on draft day, but this year's situation—two third-round picks and none in the fourth or fifth round—does not have an obvious solution. The team could use the extra third-round pick as part of a package to move up and grab a defensive lineman, or it could trade the choice to get more picks. Regardless, because the team's free-agent focus was on offense, most of its draft picks will be defensive players.

TARGETING: The team's biggest need is a defensive tackle, but with the top ones likely

to be gone before the 21st pick, adding juice to the outside pass rush could be the first-round priority. Nebraska DE **Adam Carriker** has a great motor and could play power end on running downs and allow **Ebenezer Ekuban** to serve as a spot rusher. Purdue DE **Anthony Spencer** and Florida DE **Jarvis Moss** also are solid first-round possibilities. If Michigan DT **Alan Branch** plummets, however, the team will grab him; he has the size (6-5³/₄, 324) and skills that fit **Jim Bates'** defense. Tennessee DT **Justin Harrell** and Florida DT **Marcus Thomas** are second-round options. After releasing MLB **Al Wilson**, the Broncos could look for a linebacker in the early rounds. They would be thrilled if Mississippi's **Patrick Willis** fell to them in Round 1. They also could take a safety—as insurance for **Nick Ferguson** and his balky knees—on the first day; Florida's **Reggie Nelson** would be a good fit. On Day 2, they likely will look for offensive linemen and running backs. —*Lee Rasizer*



PAUL NISELY / SN

The Broncos could use Spencer's quickness to turn up the heat on opposing quarterbacks.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	21	Adam Carriker	DE	Nebraska
2	56	Marcus Thomas	DT	Florida
3	70	Craig Davis	WR	LSU
3	86	Marshal Yanda	OT	Iowa
6	176	John Bowie	CB	Cincinnati
6	198	Mario Henderson	OT	Florida State
7	233	Brandon Siler	LB	Florida



22nd pick Dallas

COWBOYS

TEAM NEEDS

OLB
S
WR
DT
CB
RB
OT
QB
DE
ILB
PR
G
C
K
FB
LS
KR
TE
P

DECISION MAKERS: **Bill Parcells** is gone, so owner **Jerry Jones** moves to the front of the line. He will get input from VP of pro and college scouting **Jeff Ireland** and VP **Stephen Jones**, but the owner clearly has the final say.

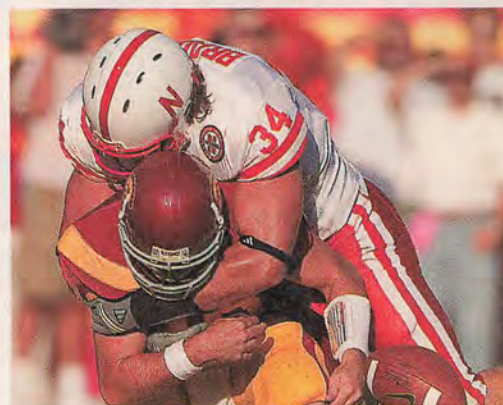
DRAFT BUZZ: It's unlikely the team will move into the top 10—especially considering coach **Wade Phillips** doesn't want any rookie starters—but it may make a bold move by dealing RB **Julius Jones**, who could bring a second-round pick. The Cowboys think he wears down, and they are shifting to a power running game, which strays from Jones' strengths. OLB **Greg Ellis** also could be dealt, and Denver is a possible destination because Broncos coordinator **Jim Bates** is a former Dallas assistant.

TARGETING: The Cowboys have not drafted an offensive player in the first round since 1997. That run could end with a wideout—LSU's **Dwayne Bowe**, Tennessee's **Robert**

Meachem, USC's **Dwayne Jarrett** or USC's **Steve Smith**. Any of those players could help immediately in three- or four-receiver sets and be groomed behind **Terrell Owens**, 33, or **Terry Glenn**, 32. The team also could address wideout later and use the 22nd pick on Florida S **Reggie Nelson**. He plays a terrific center field and has the range and speed that make scouts drool. Taking Nelson would allow SS **Roy Williams** to spend the bulk of his time near the line. Though the Cowboys have invested heavily in linebackers the past two drafts, they still want to add an outside linebacker or an end who can be converted into one. Ellis is coming off a ruptured Achilles', and OLB **Bobby Carpenter** isn't an explosive pass rusher. The team would love to add a second- or third-round pick, then grab a player such as Purdue DE **Anthony Spencer** or Nebraska OLB **Stewart Bradley**. The Cowboys need someone to play on the strong side, so whoever they take must weigh at least 250 pounds. —*Jean-Jacques Taylor*

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	22	Reggie Nelson	S	Florida
2	53	Anthony Gonzalez	WR	Ohio State
3	87	Arron Sears	G	Tennessee
4	122	Adam Koets	OT	Oregon State
5	159	Tyler Thigpen	QB	Coastal Carolina
6	195	Marques Gunn	DE	Auburn
6	200	Montavious Pitts	CB	Jacksonville St.
7	212	Tony Taylor	ILB	Georgia
7	234	Anthony Waters	ILB	Clemson
7	237	Kurt Quarterman	G	Louisville



ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

Bradley has the size and pass-rush skills to Cowboy up in Dallas' scheme.



23rd pick Kansas City

CHIEFS

TEAM NEEDS

DT
CB
FB
DE
WR
G
RB
OT
QB
C
ILB
S
PR
KR
K
TE
OLB
LS
P

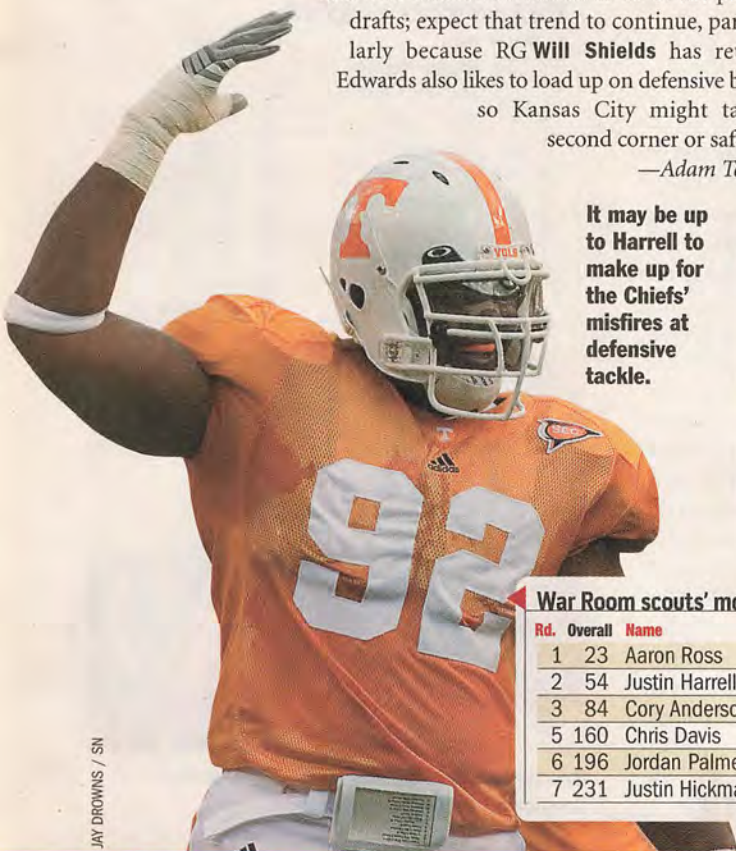
DECISION MAKERS: Team president-G.M. **Carl Peterson** has the final say, and he prefers drafting proven performers over workout warriors. The Chiefs' draft success improved greatly in 2006, when coach **Herm Edwards** was hired and player personnel VP **Bill Kuharich** took on a more prominent role.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Chiefs have only six picks—they're short a fourth-rounder—and would like to add selections. They will listen to trade offers for QB **Trent Green**, S **Greg Wesley** and KR/WR **Dante Hall**, among others. There's little chance the Chiefs will trade up, at least in the first round. They have too many needs for this to be a one-player draft. The biggest need is defensive tackle, but the Chiefs won't find value there picking at No. 23. Look for them to settle for a lesser prospect in the second round or later.

TARGETING: A cornerback such as Texas' **Aaron Ross** or UNLV's **Eric Wright** would make sense in the first round. The Chiefs are old and thin at the position. They could use Ross, Wright or another rookie as a No. 3 corner in 2007 and get him ready to start in '08. Ross also would be available to return kicks if Hall is traded or released. If Tennessee DT **Justin Harrell** is available in Round 2, the Chiefs may have a difficult time passing on him. Harrell (6-3, 305) is big and physical and makes plays with sheer effort. Michigan State's **Cliff Ryan** is a possibility in a later round. The team would like to upgrade at receiver, but that isn't an immediate priority. It also would like to find a blocking fullback and add depth at running back, quarterback and defensive end. Plus, the Chiefs have selected at least one offensive lineman in 11 of the past 12 drafts; expect that trend to continue, particularly because RG **Will Shields** has retired. Edwards also likes to load up on defensive backs, so Kansas City might take a second corner or safety.

—Adam Teicher

It may be up to Harrell to make up for the Chiefs' misfires at defensive tackle.



JAY DROWNS / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	23	Aaron Ross	CB	Texas
2	54	Justin Harrell	DT	Tennessee
3	84	Cory Anderson	FB	Tennessee
5	160	Chris Davis	WR	Florida State
6	196	Jordan Palmer	QB	UTEP
7	231	Justin Hickman	DE	UCLA



24th/28th picks New England

PATRIOTS

TEAM NEEDS

S
CB
ILB
OT
OLB
WR
RB
FB
TE
G
C
DE
DT
P
KR
PR
LS
QB
K



JOHN AMIS / AP

Nelson has dazzling playmaking ability in coverage and is a great candidate to shore up the Pats' safety spot.

DECISION MAKERS: As renowned as **Bill Belichick** is for game-planning, he and player personnel VP **Scott Pioli** may be just as gifted at managing the draft. Those two and college scouting director **Thomas Dimitroff** are adept at identifying players who fit the team's schemes.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Patriots usually are content to remain at the bottom of the first round, where they get productive players for less money. This year, they likely will use their two first-round picks on defense because they acquired three wideouts, a running back and a tight end in the free-agent market, they spent their first six picks on offense and special teams last year and they're getting old at both linebacker spots and in the secondary. Still, the team has a history of taking the best available player in the first round.

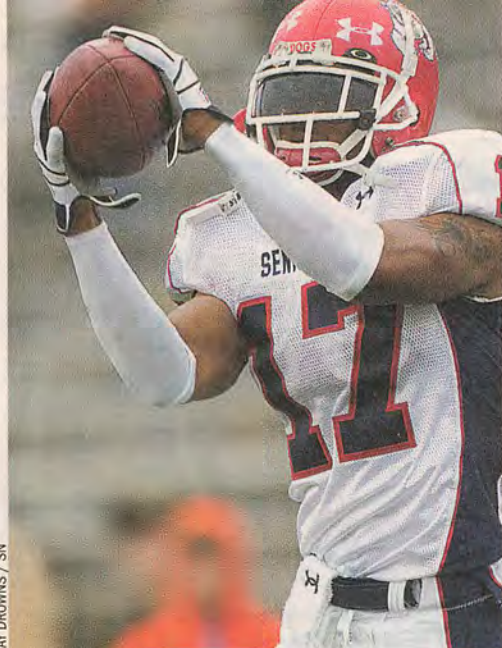
TARGETING: Though linebacker is a big need, the team won't necessarily take one early. The Pats haven't selected a linebacker earlier than in the fifth round in Belichick's previous seven drafts, and they've taken just five overall. Still, a couple of this year's prospects have appeal. Miami ILB **Jon Beason** (6-0 1/4, 237) lacks ideal size but could help in coverage. Michigan's **David Harris** struggles in man coverage but has good instincts and is productive.

The team also needs a safety. Florida's **Reggie Nelson** and Miami's **Brandon Meriweather** are first-round possibilities. Both have excellent coverage skills, though Meriweather has had character issues. Depth at corner must be addressed. Fresno State's **Marcus McCauley** and Syracuse's **Tanard Jackson** are first-round options. Don't be shocked if the Pats take an offensive tackle in the first round, particularly if Central Michigan's **Joe Staley** is available. Arkansas' **Tony Ugoh** is another possibility. The team likely will address running back and wideout in the middle rounds. Rutgers FB **Brian Leonard** is the Patriots' kind of player and may be available in Round 3. —John Tomase

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	24	Brandon Meriweather	S	Miami
1	28	David Harris	ILB	Michigan
3	91	Tarell Brown	CB	Texas
4	127	Dwayne Wright	RB	Fresno State
5	171	Rhema McKnight	WR	Notre Dame
6	180	Jacob Bender	OT	Nicholls State
6	202	Chris Denman	OT	Fresno State
6	208	Maurice Price	WR	Charleston So.
6	209	Tyler Ecker	TE	Michigan
7	247	Jason Trusnik	DE	Ohio Northern

DRAFT DATA >> Tennessee's Justin Harrell suffered a severe arm injury last season but insisted on playing against Florida the next week before having surgery. >>



McCauley has the talent to become the top corner the Jets want, but he has to be more consistent.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	25	Marcus McCauley	CB	Fresno State
2	59	Justin Blalock	G	Texas
2	63	Paul Soliai	DT	Utah
3	89	Zak DeOssie	ILB	Brown
5	164	Mike Walker	WR	Central Florida
6	177	Sabby Piscitelli	S	Oregon State



25th pick New York

JETS

TEAM NEEDS
CB
ILB
G
PR
OT
OLB
DE
DT
WR
TE
S
FB
LS
QB
RB
K
P
KR
C

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. Mike Tannenbaum has the final say, but coach Eric Mangini has considerable input and can get any player he really wants.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Jets need a starting-caliber cornerback opposite Andre Dyson. Barring a late acquisition, that hole will shape the way the team sets up its board. Tannenbaum is more apt to trade down than up. The Jets hope to recoup a pick (they have only six overall) and will be looking to deal WR Justin McCareins—possibly to the Eagles or Titans. ILB Eric Barton and CB David Barrett also are candidates to be dealt, but they don't have as much trade value as McCareins, who has 188 receptions in the past five seasons.

TARGETING: The Jets would love to take a cornerback at No. 25, but the top two prospects, Michigan's Leon Hall and Pitt's Darrelle Revis, probably will be gone. Texas' Aaron Ross, Arkansas' Chris Houston and Fresno State's

Marcus McCauley are in the next tier, and the Jets could take one of them in the first round or with one of their two second-round selections. The Jets also could target a road grader such as Texas G Justin Blalock or Auburn G Ben Grubbs early in the draft. Miami TE Greg Olsen (6-5 $\frac{7}{8}$, 255) is a first-round wild card who can catch, run and help in the red zone. But Olsen would be a luxury pick. If the Jets try to diversify the passing attack, a good Round 2 option would be Ohio State WR Anthony Gonzalez, who could be a terrific slot receiver. With Barton on thin ice, the Jets need an inside linebacker to play alongside Jonathan Vilma in the 3-4. Michigan's David Harris or Brown's Zak DeOssie would fit nicely. The Jets also could use a run stuffer and another end for their rotation. Purdue's Anthony Spencer or Michigan's LaMarr Woodley could contribute immediately as an outside pass rusher while learning to stand up as a 3-4 outside linebacker. —Rich Cimini



26th pick Philadelphia

EAGLES

TEAM NEEDS
DE
S
OLB
ILB
CB
TE
RB
DT
FB
OT
PR
KR
WR
QB
G
C
LS
P
K

DECISION MAKERS: Coach Andy Reid runs the draft and has the final say on all picks, but he missed this year's Combine after taking a leave of absence, so look for G.M. Tom Heckert and the scouts to have more input.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Eagles have only six picks, their fewest ever entering a draft; don't be surprised if they trade out of Round 1 to compile extra first-day selections. Free-agent acquisition Kevin Curtis eliminates most of the need to draft a wideout. However, newly acquired OLB Takeo Spikes is 30 and still recovering from an Achilles' tendon injury he suffered in 2005, so expect the team to take a linebacker or two in the middle rounds as possible successors to Spikes and MLB Jeremiah Trotter.

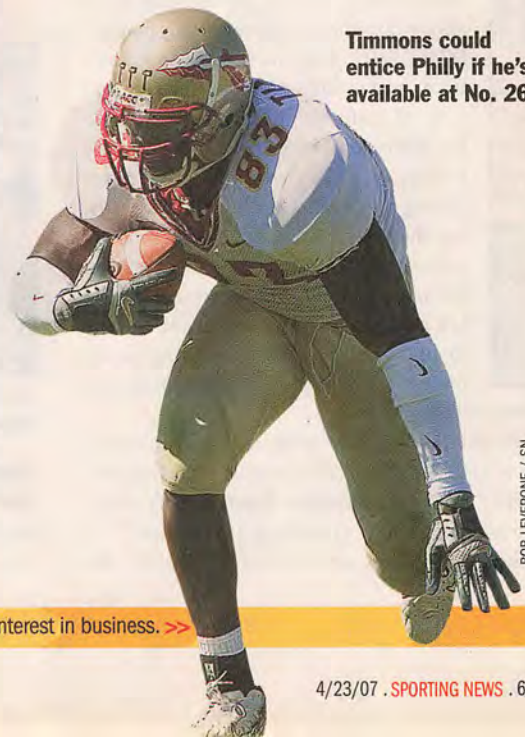
TARGETING: The Eagles likely will select the best defensive player available in the first round if they keep their pick—they need help everywhere. It will be difficult for them

to pass on Florida E Jarvis Moss or Georgia E Charles Johnson if either falls to No. 26. Jevon Kearse is coming back from a serious knee injury, and Darren Howard isn't the player the team expected him to be. The Eagles also will have a tough decision if Penn State OLB Paul Posluszny or Florida State OLB Lawrence Timmons is available. It's doubtful Texas CB Aaron Ross or Pitt CB Darrelle Revis will be around, so the team may look at Syracuse's Tanard Jackson or Fresno State's Marcus McCauley; both can also play safety. Cal CB Daymeion Hughes, if he falls, is a second-round option, as is Virginia Tech S Aaron Rouse. If the Eagles take a linebacker in Round 2, Oklahoma's Rufus Alexander is a possibility. Also keep an eye on Rutgers RB Brian Leonard, especially if the team trades out of Round 1. Reid believes the draft's best receiving back would complement Brian Westbrook perfectly. After the defense is addressed, the team could add a tight end. —Mark Eckel

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	26	Jarvis Moss	DE	Florida
2	57	Rufus Alexander	OLB	Oklahoma
3	90	Tony Franklin	CB	Virginia
5	162	Kenny Scott	CB	Georgia Tech
6	201	Zach Latimer	ILB	Oklahoma
7	236	Deon Anderson	FB	Connecticut

Timmons could entice Philly if he's available at No. 26.





27th pick New Orleans

SAINTS

TEAM NEEDS
CB
WR
DT
OLB
ILB
TE
G
QB
DE
C
FB
OT
KR
S
P
RB
LS
PR
K

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Mickey Loomis** works with his top personnel men and coach **Sean Payton**. The team has a track record of taking the best player available—it selected RBs **Deuce McAllister** and **Reggie Bush** and DE **Will Smith** when it appeared set at those spots.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Saints have been active dealers in recent drafts, and they could stir up things again, especially considering they have three fourth-round picks. Cornerback and wide receiver are the big needs, and this is a deep class for both positions.

TARGETING: The Saints allowed too many big pass plays in 2006, and with CBs **Mike McKenzie**, **Fred Thomas** and **Jason Craft** all in their 30s, they need an immediate upgrade at corner. Michigan's **Leon Hall** will be long gone by No. 27, but the team figures to have a shot at Texas' **Aaron Ross** or Arkansas' **Chris Houston**. If there isn't an

appealing corner on the board, the team could go with a fallback choice in Round 2. The Saints lost WR **Joe Horn**—the only starter who has departed—so expect them to snap up a wideout in one of the first two rounds. Round 1 possibilities include Tennessee's **Robert Meachem**, LSU's **Dwayne Bowe**, South Carolina's **Sidney Rice** and USC's **Dwayne Jarrett** and **Steve Smith**. If the team goes for a corner in the first round, LSU WR **Craig Davis** and Fresno State WR **Paul Williams** will be Round 2 options. Miami TE **Greg Olsen**, who could give the team a big red zone target, is another first-round possibility. Though the defense is solid, it could use more disruptive playmakers. Penn State OLB **Paul Posluszny** will be hard to pass up if he falls to No. 27. The team needs to get younger behind DTs **Hollis Thomas** and **Brian Young** and deeper behind DEs **Charles Grant** and **Smith**. Payton is a longtime quarterbacks coach, so look for him to pick his next project in the middle or late rounds. —Mike Triplett



With Williams, the Saints might be able to strike gold at receiver for the second straight year.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	27	Chris Houston	CB	Arkansas
2	58	Paul Williams	WR	Fresno State
3	88	Brandon Mebane	DT	California
4	123	Juwan Simpson	OLB	Alabama
4	125	Matt Spaeth	TE	Minnesota
4	126	Julius Wilson	OT	UAB
5	163	Dallas Baker	WR	Florida
7	220	Jeff Rowe	QB	Nevada



29th pick Baltimore

RAVENS

TEAM NEEDS
OT
CB
OLB
FB
G
DE
ILB
C
RB
QB
DT
PR
KR
WR
TE
S
LS
K
P

DECISION MAKER: G.M. **Ozzie Newsome's** drafts are the main reason the Ravens have been successful since moving to Baltimore in 1995. His philosophy is to always take the best player on his board.

DRAFT BUZZ: After trading three picks (a third- and seventh-rounder this year and a third-rounder in 2008) to acquire RB **Willis McGahee** from the Bills, the Ravens aren't likely to make any trades during the draft. They have a few needs, but they aren't pressing. The team likely will try to stockpile young talent for the future because it has old players at a lot of key positions. Don't look for the Ravens to make much earth-shattering news; their draft strategy will be plain, simple and, at times, boring.

TARGETING: The Ravens want to find an offensive tackle and cornerback with their first two picks. Even if LT **Jonathan Ogden** doesn't retire, they have to start grooming a successor. Two likely candidates are Central Michigan's **Joe**



The Ravens could tab Staley to be the heir apparent at left tackle.

Staley, who has quick feet, and Arkansas' **Tony Ugho**, who excels at pass blocking. If neither is available when the team picks, it will look at cornerbacks: Cal's **Daymeion Hughes**, Syracuse's

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	29	Tony Ugho	T	Arkansas
2	61	Josh Wilson	CB	Maryland
4	134	Stephen Nicholas	OLB	South Florida
4	137	Gijon Robinson	TE	Missouri West.
5	166	Kolby Smith	RB	Louisville
5	174	Matt Moore	QB	Oregon State
6	203	Michael Okwo	ILB	Stanford
6	207	DeAndre Jackson	CB	Iowa State

Tanard Jackson, Fresno State's **Marcus McCauley** or Pitt's **Darrelle Revis** might be available. The Ravens want a player who can be the nickel back and challenge CB **Samari Rolle** for a starting job. Even if the team takes an offensive tackle in the first round, it most likely will draft defensive players with its next two picks. With the top four corners expected to be gone by the end of Round 1, Maryland's **Josh Wilson** or Virginia's **Tony Franklin** could be a second-round target. With two fourth-round picks, the team could look at an outside linebacker/end and a fullback who can be a lead blocker in short-yardage situations and in the red zone. The Ravens also will look to add youth at running back and quarterback on the second day of the draft. —Mike Preston



30th pick San Diego

CHARGERS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
S
RB
DT
OLB
ILB
OT
TE
G
C
FB
DE
CB
QB
K
P
KR
PR
LS

DECISION MAKER: G.M. **A.J. Smith** has the ability to recognize players who will succeed, so it's not surprising that he makes the final calls. He puts character and work ethic on par with raw talent.

DRAFT BUZZ: The Chargers, who won 14 games last season, are stocked. Strong safety is the only position that lacks a clear starter, but the team would like to add a top-notch receiver to give QB **Philip Rivers** another target. With four first-day picks and dispensable backup RB **Michael Turner**, the Chargers could swing a trade to address both needs in the first round. Smith seems to be leaning toward that option.

TARGETING: The team has not made it a secret that it is targeting a speedy, durable wide receiver and a safety. Which position it would fill with the 30th pick—barring any trades—is less clear. Florida S **Reggie Nelson** likely will be gone, but Virginia Tech's **Aaron Rouse** has similar skills. If the Chargers wait to grab a safety in the second round, Louisiana-Monroe's **Kevin Payne** has playmaking potential and may be available. Possible first-round targets at receiver include LSU's **Dwayne Bowe**, South Carolina's **Sidney Rice** and East Carolina's **Aundrae Allison**, all of whom could grow under receivers coach **James Lofton**. Any of those three or Ohio State's **Anthony Gonzalez** could slip to the team in the second round. Regardless of whether Turner is traded, the club needs to address its long-term future at running back, and with two third-round picks, it is in position to do just that. The Chargers would be more than happy with Louisville's **Michael Bush**, a big, powerful back whose stock fell after he broke his leg last season. On the second day of the draft, the team will look for a successor to NT **Jamal Williams** and for depth at inside and outside linebacker and offensive tackle. —Kevin Acee

The Chargers would be thrilled to land Bush in Round 3.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

War Room scouts' mock draft ▶

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	31	Greg Olsen	TE	Miami
2	37	Ryan Harris	OT	Notre Dame
3	94	Anthony Arline	CB	Baylor
4	130	Jemalle Cornelius	WR	Florida
5	168	Clint Session	OLB	Pitt
7	221	Danny Ware	RB	Georgia
7	241	Scott Smith	G	California

◀ War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	30	Aundrae Allison	WR	East Carolina
2	62	Kevin Payne	S	La.-Monroe
3	93	Samson Satele	C	Hawaii
3	96	Michael Bush	RB	Louisville
4	129	Luke Smith-Anderson	TE	Idaho
5	167	Jermaine McElveen	DE	UAB
5	172	Cliff Ryan	DT	Michigan St.
7	240	Marquice Cole	CB	Northwestern

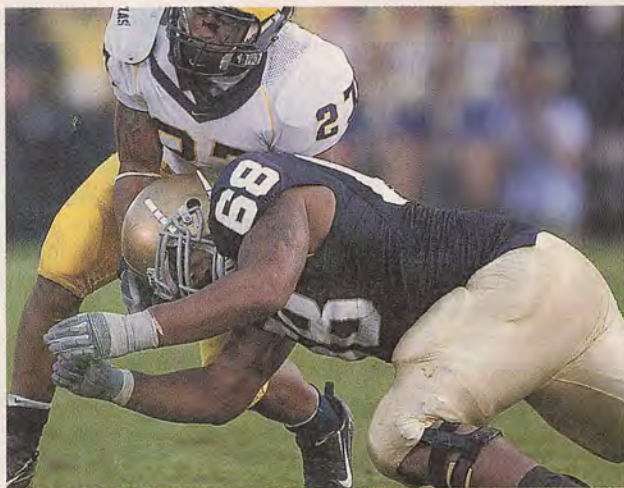
>> Greg Olsen could be the fourth Miami tight end since 2000 to be taken in the first round. >>



31st pick Chicago

BEARS

TEAM NEEDS

WR
OT
TE
OLB
CB
DT
G
RB
QB
S
DE
ILB
FB
C
P
K
PR
LS
KR

MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN ARCHIVES

The Bears' search for a tackle could end with Harris.

DECISION MAKERS: G.M. **Jerry Angelo**, who is sensitive to the bust factor from his time in Tampa Bay, generally shows more concern for a player's floor than his ceiling. He has found some gems in later rounds.

DRAFT BUZZ: WLB **Lance Briggs** wants to be traded. A proposed deal that would have sent him to the Redskins fell through, but talks could be rekindled. Briggs is adamant about sitting out the bulk of the season, which would leave the club with a major hole, considering its lack of in-house replacements. Usually, the Bears look to deal down and accumulate selections, but they could package their picks at Nos. 31 and 37 (acquired in the trade of RB **Thomas Jones** to the Jets) and move up to nab someone they really want—and need.

TARGETING: This figures to be an offense-heavy draft for the Bears. **Muhsin Muhammad**, who turns 34 next month, is a possession receiver at this point, and the team needs another speedster to reduce double-teams

on WR **Bernard Berrian** and open up things for QB **Rex Grossman**. The Bears, though, generally don't like to use high picks on receivers. Miami TE **Greg Olsen** could be a dynamic addition. He has the speed to outrun most safeties and would be a terrific upgrade. But considering the Bears tout themselves as a run-first outfit, Arizona State's **Zach Miller** might make more sense because he's a better

blocker. Offensive tackle remains an area of need; LT **John Tait** is 32, and RT **Fred Miller** is 34. The club does not have a player with good upside behind them. The team could be tempted to move up to get Penn State's **Levi Brown** or could stay where it is and target Central Michigan's **Joe Staley** or Notre Dame's **Ryan Harris**. CBs **Charles Tillman** and **Nathan Vasher** can be free agents after the 2007 season, and only one is expected to return. Baylor's **Anthony Arline** is a potential replacement. —Brad Biggs



32nd pick Indianapolis

COLTS

TEAM NEEDS
OLB
DT
WR
S
RB
ILB
OT
DE
CB
KR
PR
FB
C
TE
G
K
P
LS
QB

DECISION MAKERS: President **Bill Polian** casts the final vote but only after consulting with coach **Tony Dungy**, team executives and scouts. The Colts give special attention to finding players who fit their systems.

DRAFT BUZZ: The team has had great success in the draft, both in selecting difference-makers early and finding keepers late. The late-round success is a byproduct of the fact Dungy's defense is suited for undersized players who don't fit other schemes. Polian may trade out of the first round if he thinks a player he covets still will be available in the second.

TARGETING: The team needs to address areas weakened by the departures of OLB **Cato June**, RB **Dominic Rhodes**, S **Mike Doss**, CB **Nick Harper**, DT **Montae Reagor** and WR **Brandon Stokley**. The most pressing need is outside linebacker, so the team will look at Florida State's **Lawrence Timmons** and

Miami's **Jon Beason**. Each is a bit undersized but was productive in college. The Colts also could jump on a defensive lineman, preferably a tackle, in the first round and look for an outside linebacker later. Tennessee DT **Justin Harrell** possesses the quickness that is required to excel in Dungy's defense. Oklahoma State DT **Ryan McBean** could be worth a look on Day 2. Of course, it's possible defensive needs will be put on hold and the offense will be further strengthened. When it cut **Stokley**, the team was left without a viable No. 3 receiver. Polian won't hesitate to snatch up a receiver at No. 32—in 2001, he opted for **Reggie Wayne** rather than addressing the defense—if he's convinced that player can develop into **Marvin Harrison's** successor. The team also needs to start making plans to replace LT **Tarik Glenn**. He still is going strong but is entering his 11th year and will be a free agent at the end of the season. The team has found quality linemen late in the draft. —Mike Chappell



One of the Colts' chief needs is at defensive tackle, and that could put McBean on their radar.

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
1	32	Jon Beason	OLB	Miami
3	95	Steve Breaston	WR	Michigan
3	98	Kenneth Darby	RB	Alabama
4	131	Ryan McBean	DT	Oklahoma St.
4	136	Buster Davis	ILB	Florida State
5	169	Rob Austin	OT	Troy
5	173	Brandon McDonald	S	Memphis
7	242	Braden Jones	TE	Southern Illinois

War Room scouts' mock draft

Rd.	Overall	Name	Pos.	School
2	55	Zach Miller	TE	Arizona State
3	85	Ben Grubbs	G	Auburn
4	120	Jeremy Clark	DT	Alabama
5	161	Fred Bennett	CB	South Carolina
6	197	Tyrone Moss	RB	Miami
6	210	Vincent Marshall	WR	Houston
7	232	Larry Birdine	DE	Oklahoma

Chandler could fill Seattle's need at tight end later in the draft.



No first-round pick Seattle

SEAHAWKS

TEAM NEEDS
DT
TE
G
DE
CB
RB
FB
S
OLB
WR
ILB
OT
KR
PR
C
QB
LS
P
K

DECISION MAKERS: President/G.M. **Tim Ruskell** makes the final call after gathering input during predraft meetings with several sources, including **Mike Holmgren** and his coaching staff. **DRAFT BUZZ:** The Seahawks will take the best player available with their top pick—a second-rounder (No. 55)—and shy away from prospects with character issues. They have a surplus of wideouts and could move **Darrell Jackson** but only if they can land a second- or high third-round pick for him. After signing a bevy of free agents—LE **Patrick Kerney**, Ss **Deon Grant** and **Brian Russell** and TE **Marcus Pollard**—and re-signing Gs **Floyd Womack** and **Chris Gray**, the team has shifted its draft priorities to defensive tackle, tight end and guard.

TARGETING: Ruskell prefers players who have been consistently productive at big programs. Tennessee DT **Justin Harrell**, a

tough defensive tackle who clogs running lanes, would be a good option at No. 55. **Turk McBride**, Harrell's smaller teammate at Tennessee, and Cal's **Brandon Mebane** are later options inside. If Arizona State TE **Zach Miller** is on the board in the second round, the team will be tempted to select him. He has the pass-catching ability to help the Seahawks forget about their failure to sign free agent **Daniel Graham**. Delaware's **Ben Patrick** and Iowa's **Scott Chandler** could be worth a look later. If the team takes the best player, it might grab Michigan DE **LaMarr Woodley**, LSU WR **Craig Davis** or East Carolina WR **Aundrae Allison** at No. 55. Auburn G **Ben Grubbs** has the athletic ability to play in the team's blocking schemes, and Akron's **Andy Alleman** is another interior option—though he would need more time to develop. On the second day, the team will look for depth at corner and running back and try to pick up a position player who can help as a return man. —Clare Farnsworth

DRAFT DATA

>> Pittsburgh has the longest active streak of consecutive years with a first-round pick: 39 heading into this draft. >>>

Sorry, but there's nothing "real" about a playoff outcome determined by players slogging their way across the ice for four extra periods.

Running marathons on ice is a bad idea

By Kara Yorio

kyorio@sportingnews.com

And here they come for the fifth overtime. Aren't they warriors? Aren't they courageous? Isn't this the best part about the NHL playoffs?

No, no and no.

Hockey players are not warriors, and they are not courageous. They are incredibly skilled, strong-willed, athletic professionals who can make their bodies do outrageous things, such as play 140 minutes of hockey or more in a night. But they shouldn't have to show us that mental and physical strength. It shouldn't be allowed.

End it now. OK, next playoffs, to be fair. But end it, already.

Give the teams two 20-minute overtime periods, then go to the shootout. Even two extra periods might be too much, but this is called a compromise.

The shootout isn't real hockey, you say? The bastardization of the game that's allowed in the regular season shouldn't even be considered when it matters most? Fine, but it also isn't real hockey—particularly not NHL hockey—out there on slush in the third, fourth and fifth overtimes with guys who barely can lift their legs and goalies fresh off of IV fluids at the last intermission.

If the shootout is a good enough way to decide how teams get into the playoffs, then it should be a good enough way to decide who wins the games once they're there—after teams have been given a long enough chance to finish things off with that "real hockey."

Asking these players to play beyond two overtimes is unfair, unhealthy, mentally and physically exhausting and detrimental to the quality of hockey that comes in later games. During the regular season, teams cannot play three nights in a row. Why



By the time the fourth overtime rolled around, it was an accomplishment for the Canucks and Stars just to stay on their feet.

is it OK to ask them to play more than nine periods in three nights during the playoffs?

Everyone loves to talk about these marathon games—where they were as they watched into the wee hours of the morning. Everyone who made it through the 92 minutes and one second of overtime between the Penguins and Flyers in 2000 can relive those final moments spent at the bar or on their couch. Anyone around for the 1987 Easter Epic between the Islanders and Capitals (an extra 68:47 of hockey that holiday) has a story to tell.

And good for them.

But the good stories wouldn't be lost. Five periods is plenty of time to create lasting memories. And you could talk about where you were after living and dying through 100 minutes of hockey, then watching that shootout goal go in.

The great moments would be there.

And if your team were to lose in a nonelimination game, it might have enough left to come back and win the series.

Protect the players. Value the hockey. End the endurance test.

SN

S Lack the stamina to make it through overtime? Our team will get you up to speed with playoff analysis at sportingnews.com.

INSIDE DISH

The Blackhawks won the draft lottery, but without a clear-cut top pick as in recent drafts, they might use that No. 1 spot as a bargaining chip in a deal. If they keep the pick, they will probably take a forward—most likely choosing among RW **Alexei Cherepanov**, RW **Patrick Kane**, RW **Jakub Voracek** and C **Kyle Turris**. ➤ The Coyotes organization had no choice but to make a big change in hopes of finding some success for the franchise. Coach and managing partner **Wayne Gretzky** isn't going anywhere, but he stays without his close friend, fired G.M. **Mike Barnett**. The *Arizona Republic* says the rumored list of G.M. candidates includes Canucks assistant G.M. **Steve Tambellini**, Rangers assistant G.M. **Don Maloney** and Red Wings assistant G.M. **Jim Nill**. ➤ The great risk Detroit took in trading for **Todd Bertuzzi** hasn't shown much reward early in the playoffs—and, surprisingly, it hasn't been because of his back. Bertuzzi suffered a concussion during a couple of on-ice collisions early this month. That injury, plus ongoing recovery from back surgery, means it is unlikely he will be the force at power forward the Red Wings were looking for in the playoffs.



Bertuzzi

➤ There is elite hockey other than the Stanley Cup playoffs this time of year. The world championships start next week in Moscow.

A few teams need to be open to some advice on closing.

How to save the season

By Stan McNeal

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The season has barely warmed up and closer issues have already come under more scrutiny than the rosin on Francisco Rodriguez's cap. Judging from the myriad ways clubs have handled their ninth-inning situations, it appears they could use some assistance.

Of course, I'm glad to provide it ...

Brad Lidge

Issue: Still unable to recover his once-dominant slider, Lidge was demoted to sixth-inning duty after two bad outings. He says his arm feels fine, the Astros insist he hasn't lost velocity on his upper-90s four-seamer, and in spring training Lidge thought he had identified and fixed his mechanical flaws. Perhaps he really hasn't recovered from that Albert Pujols blast in October 2005.

Advice: Trade him while you can still get valuable players in return. Astros general manager Tim Purpura says he's not ready to acknowledge the possibility that a fresh start is the answer to Lidge's woes—and the club hopes steady work in nonsave situations will help him regain his confidence and consistency. But Lidge needs an escape from the Crawford Boxes.

Jonathan Papelbon

Issue: It's not the decision to put him back in the bullpen. Red Sox G.M. Theo Epstein says that was an easy call after Papelbon, worried about missing ninth-inning duty, said he was having trouble sleeping (of course, the thought of Julian Tavarez preserving your leads would keep you awake, too). What has come into question is manager Terry Francona's use of Papelbon in the eighth inning. If preserving the soundness of Papelbon's shoulder was the reason the Red Sox wanted him in the rotation, having him work more than an inning seems risky, especially this early in the season.

Advice: Don't change anything. Papelbon makes the Red Sox a much stronger team as the closer than he would as the No. 4 starter. His shoulder is checked on a daily basis, and, as Francona told reporters, there's only one

The way Jorge Julio has pitched, the Marlins might be in the market for a closer.



The Rangers told Gagne he could close, but they would be smart to make sure he's healthy first.

situation when Papelbon will pitch in the eighth: "When we're getting ready to lose." It just happened to occur twice last week—the opposing Nos. 3 and 4 hitters came up in the eighth with the game on the line. Against the Rangers, Papelbon blew away Michael Young and Mark Teixeira popped up. Against the Angels, Vladimir Guerrero struck out and Garret Anderson lined out. In such cases, the ninth inning can become anticlimactic; Papelbon wasn't even needed in the ninth against the Angels.

Eric Gagne

Issue: When Gagne was completing his rehab assignment in the minors, new manager Ron Washington told reporters Gagne might not close immediately upon his return. The rookie manager, however, then decided that not having Gagne close would be going against the promise the club had given him when it signed him.

Advice: Don't hesitate to use Akinori Otsuka if Gagne strug-

gles. Washington should be admired for his honesty, but he needs to realize this is not Gagne circa 2004. Besides, the Rangers' bullpen got off to a strong start with Otsuka as the closer.

Armando Benitez

Issue: After his dismal 2006, the Giants considered trading Benitez, but he pitched well in spring training and seemed to benefit from an attitude adjustment. Benitez converted his first two save chances—but not without considerable adventure. Benitez, who like Gagne no longer features overpowering stuff, allowed six baserunners and gave up two runs in his first 2⅓ innings.

Advice: Trade him before it's too late. Given the way Jorge Julio has pitched, the Marlins might be in the market for a closer.

Chad Cordero

Issue: Instead of trading Cordero in the off-season—he likely would have fetched a couple of decent prospects—the rebuilding Nationals opted to keep him.

Advice: Get a lead now and then so Cordero can pitch in a save situation more than once every 10 games.

SN

INSIDE DISH

The Marlins are surprising the National League East again, and this season it's with a maturing offense instead of with young arms. 1B **Mike Jacobs** and LF **Josh Willingham**

are settling into the Nos. 4 and 5 spots behind 3B **Miguel Cabrera**, and Florida leads the N.L. in runs. ➤ Many players take indoor batting practice before or after regular B.P., but Padres SS **Khalil Greene** has taken that idea a step further. Whenever he can, he does all of his pregame hitting indoors. He's able to be more selective in choosing which pitches to hit when he knows other hitters aren't waiting for him to finish his turn. ➤ The Dodgers know they have to manufacture runs because they lack power, so even the veterans are running. In one inning last week, 1B **Nomar Garciaparra** and LF **Luis Gonzalez** stole bases and 2B **Jeff Kent** went from first to third on a ground-ball single. All three scored. ➤ One reason RHP **Ramon Ortiz** is off to a strong start for the Twins: He's throwing a changeup shown to him by a teammate—LHP **Johan Santana**. ➤ Indians CF **Grady Sizemore's** goals entering the season were to reduce his strikeouts and improve his hitting against lefties. A more disciplined approach has helped him do both. Entering the week, he had more walks than strikeouts and already had homered twice off lefthanders. ➤ As expected, Phillies 1B **Ryan Howard** isn't seeing many strikes. He walked at least once in 10 of his first 11 games and walked four times in one game against the Astros. A lack of production by the guy hitting behind him, LF **Pat Burrell**, isn't the reason. Burrell is hitting .333 and is 5-for-10 with runners in scoring position. ➤ The Angels have been encouraged by RHP **Bartolo Colon's** minor league rehab starts because he has been able to maintain velocity on his fastball, which has been clocked at 95 mph. Colon could be back by the end of April, which would put him about a



BOB LEVERONE / SN

BLOG ALERT

'Hi, Carl. How ya feeling? A little achy? Got the sniffles? Here's a Kleenex. Think you can take the ball today?'

Apparently not. Even before Carl Pavano returned to the D.L., Ryan Fagan was predicting the downfall of the Yankees' rotation. Join the discussion at sportingnews.com.

Jacobs and his teammates have been rounding third and heading for home a lot this season.

month ahead of schedule. ➤ Though Brewers CF **Bill Hall** still is adjusting to his new position, a lack of offense is why he didn't start in consecutive games last week. ➤ No one will be hurt by early-season weather woes more than the Mariners, who annually lead the majors in frequent-flyer miles because their nearest possible opponent is 800 miles away. They have to make up five games on their 15 remaining scheduled off-days, and five of those off-days are already consumed by cross-country trips. ➤ Give the Devil Rays props for being able to bounce back. They handed Santana his first home loss since 2005 a night after an embarrassing defeat. In the ninth inning of a tie game, SS **Ben Zobrist** and LF **Carl Crawford** both arrived at third base on the same play—a potential triple by Crawford—and both managed to be tagged out in what will be one of the weirdest plays all season.

The Padres' pen packs a punch

Bruce Bochy was given a lot of credit for how he handled relievers in his 12 seasons managing the Padres. Well, general manager Kevin Towers deserves to take a few bows, too. Bochy is gone, replaced by Bud Black, but the Padres' bullpen remains effective. The relievers set a major league record with 29 1/3 scoreless innings to begin the season.

Towers' keys to a successful bullpen:

Get guys who throw strikes. The Padres' bullpen allowed fewer walks than any in the N.L. in 2006 and was averaging 2.4 per nine innings entering the week.

Don't fret over the righty-lefty thing. The Padres have nothing but righthanders in their bullpen, and through 11 games, lefthanders were hitting .171 against them and righthanders were batting .173.

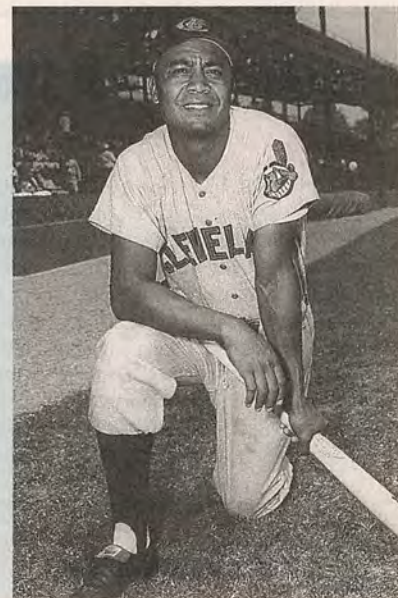
Make sure the all-time saves leader is on your side. When Towers took over as G.M., Trevor Hoffman already was closing in San Diego.

speedreads

After a commendable job of honoring Jackie Robinson, let's hope MLB doesn't overlook the 60th anniversary of **Larry Doby's** first game. Doby, the A.L.'s first black player, took center field for the Indians on July 5, 1947—a little more than two months after Robinson broke in with the Dodgers.

Advice for A-Rod: Forget that awesome start. You know Yankees fans will forget it if you struggle this weekend against the Red Sox.

If you want to know what's up with Curt Schilling, or at least what he's willing to disclose, check out his blog at 38pitches.com. He posted after his past two starts, and if nothing else, the guy is long-winded: more than 5,500 words combined. (That's nearly four times the number of words combined on these two pages.)



SN ARCHIVES

FantasySource

Become a waiver-wire wonder

By Roger Kuznia

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It's easiest to add talent during the opening weeks of the season, when owners can snap up players who slipped through the cracks on draft day.

Determining whether free agents in your fantasy league are real gold or fool's gold can be difficult. Consider a number of factors when deciding whether to burn a waiver claim by picking up a free agent.

Lineup changes. If a player not only becomes a regular but also is put in the meat of the order, he deserves your attention. The Pirates put Freddy Sanchez in the No. 3 spot last year, and he went on to lead the National League in hitting. The Twins moved Michael Cuddyer to the cleanup spot, and he totaled 109 RBIs and 102 runs scored while primarily hitting between Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau.

Top prospects. Should you believe in Zack Greinke's hot start? Absolutely. Before he went on his hiatus last year to address psychological problems, remember he was the No. 6 overall pick in the 2002 draft. High draft picks have high talent levels.

Track records and medical records. Is a



Lowry's health again matches his talent.

ERIC RISBERG / AP

player who suffered through injuries in 2006 now fully healthy? Is an established veteran coming off a subpar year? If a player in either scenario looks promising this season, jump on him. I expect Noah Lowry to bounce back from an off year in 2006, when he battled an oblique injury. I remember how well he did in the second halves of 2004 and '05. I'm also a big supporter of Tim Hudson's despite his rocky

2006 campaign.

Seeing is believing. If you subscribe to Extra Innings, you'll have the chance to see players perform for yourself. If you see a hitter with a good stroke or a pitcher who can consistently find the edges of the plate, give him a shot. Even if you don't have a TV package, we at Fantasy Source do, and we'll give our opinions on the hot pickups each week.

< COUNTERPOINTS >

Would you rather take a chance on a can't-miss prospect or an aging All-Star?

PROSPECT

I'm not advocating littering your team with fresh-from-the-farm pups. But when it comes to filling the last couple of lineup spots, picking an established veteran is as risky—and as exciting—as running across a deserted street. Those aging All-Stars have reached their ceilings and won't surprise you with improved numbers. I'd rather gamble on hitting it big with Mike Pelfrey than be assured of getting the mediocre stats Matt Morris will provide. Give me Corey Hart's upside over Shawn Green's middling consistency. —Rob Hurtt

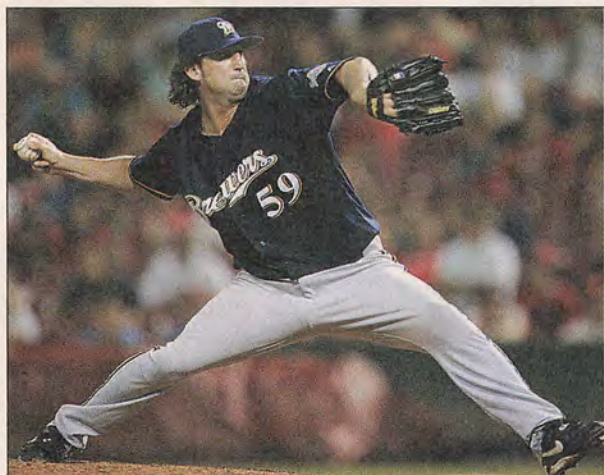


Pelfrey

GENE J. PUSKAS / AP

VETERAN

Unless we're talking about a keeper league, I'd be more inclined to pick up the aging All-Star. Prospecting is far from an exact science—go back and consult some old Topps "Future Star" baseball cards if you don't believe me. A prospect not only has to deal with the increased quality of competition, but he also must get used to the big league lifestyle and ballparks. Even if he adjusts well, he's unlikely to produce to his potential as a rookie. With a veteran, you have a pretty good idea what to expect: a little bit less than last year. —Eric Ferguson



AL BEHRMAN / AP

Turnbow is going so well he could outgrow his setup role.

FANTASY DISH

New Cubs manager **Lou Piniella** has been anything but sweet to fantasy owners. Following in **Dusty Baker**'s footsteps as a veteran-lover, Piniella has flip-flopped on his plans in left field and is starting **Cliff Floyd** over **Matt Murton**

the majority of the time. Mixed leaguers are better off without Murton—

until Floyd's first trip to the D.L. ➤ No matter how good a closer is, he can't pile up saves without a lead. Just ask **Chad Cordero**. With the Nationals' anemic offense, shaky bullpen and no-name rotation, Cordero often will pitch in nonsave situations. That rarely produces good results for fantasy owners. ➤ The Giants scrapped the idea of hitting OF **Barry Bonds** third. That doesn't matter much to Bonds owners, but it makes **Rich Aurilia** more attractive to mixed leaguers. Aurilia will get plenty of pitches to hit as the new No. 3 hitter. You always can find room for a guy who qualifies at first and third base and shortstop. ➤ Keep an eye on Milwaukee's **Derrick Turnbow**. If he continues to pitch well in a setup role, he eventually could be dealt to a team in need of a closer—resulting in an instant value boost. —Chris Bahr

5 in your face

1. Ozzie Guillen's comparison of some Minnesota players to piranhas spawned a Twins ad campaign. The Devil Rays, however, haven't enjoyed the same success with their "stinky dead eels" idea.

2. A Blue Jays ad in which Frank Thomas joins his children's pillow fight has been banned from Canadian television for being too violent. However, no government action has been taken to prevent pitcher Tomo Ohka from receiving repeated beatings on the mound.

3. After Adam LaRoche's slow start in Pittsburgh, it's safe to assume he won't be appearing real soon on NBC's *Thank God You're Here!*

4. Not that anyone should pattern himself after Sammy Sosa, but taking a year off is pretty tempting, isn't it, Brad Lidge?

5. Some folks attribute Eric Byrnes' blistering start to the fact he's in a contract year. I think he's motivated not to be stuck with Jeanne Zelasko again this October. —R.H.



Apparently, Thomas swings a big pillow, too.



STOCK WATCH Whose value is moving up—and down?



Rising

Akinori Iwamura, 3B, Devil Rays. When in doubt, go with the Japanese guy. At least that's what ESPN's Tim Kurkjian said. But not even Ichiro could keep this up.

Ryan Church, OF, Nationals. Church's hot start has helped him nail down a starting job. He deserves a spot on your roster to see if he can keep it going.

Kip Wells, SP,

Cardinals. Pitching coach Dave Duncan turned Jeff Suppan and Jeff Weaver into something, so you can bet Wells' quick start isn't a complete fluke.

Falling

Alex Gordon, 3B, Royals. He started his career 4-for-36 but still has plenty of keeper value and will improve once he adjusts to big league pitching.

Sammy Sosa, OF, Rangers. Owning Sosa is like watching one of his warning-track flies: initially exciting but ultimately disappointing.

Jorge Julio, RP, Marlins.

Julio was a bust as the closer and will have trouble regaining the job. The Marlins have plenty of other options to try, including Henry Owens.

—George Winkler



ALBERT DICKSON / SN (3)

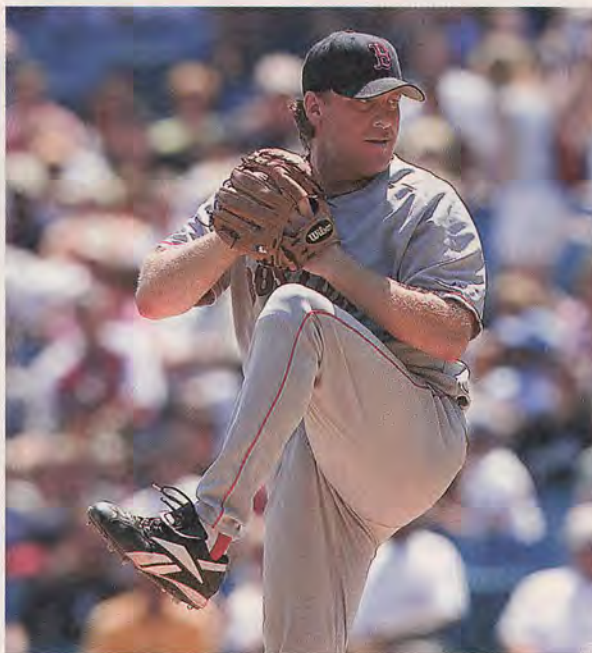
'I'm not one to take risks. I don't try strange, exotic foods. I don't bungee jump or sky-dive. But I did draft J.D. Drew.'

Go to sportingnews.com to find out why cautious Eric Ferguson decided to take the plunge for Boston's oft-injured outfielder.

Pitcher vs. batter, Sox-Yanks style

The rivalry everybody loves—or hates—to talk about begins anew with a three-game series in Boston this weekend. And one of the most relevant topics of conversation is: Which team's strength is stronger, the Red Sox's rotation or the Yankees' lineup?

The case for Boston: The Red Sox can send three No. 1-caliber starters to the mound in a row—Curt Schilling, Josh Beckett and Daisuke Matsuzaka. All three regularly hit the mid-90s with their fastballs, and all three—especially Schilling and Matsuzaka—know how to set up batters and mix their pitches. Schilling and Beckett are World Series heroes and no strangers to the spotlight. Tim Wakefield and his knuckleball are the perfect contrast to those three, and he has limited Yankees batters to a .198 average the past five seasons. Lefthander Jon Lester, when he eventually replaces Julian Tavarez as the No. 5 starter, could



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN ARCHIVES

Among the Sox's top starters, Schilling had the best of it against the Bombers last season—but that's not saying much.

be the key to the rotation. Lester, 23, already has stared down cancer, so the Yankees' lineup won't scare him.

The case for New York: The Yankees' lineup has the wonderful combination of patience, power and balance. Last year's Boston rotation was supposed to shine, but New York battered Boston's best. Beckett had a 9.45 ERA, Wakefield's was 5.49, and Schilling's was 4.18. Actually, no Red Sox pitcher really did much against the Yankees—six Bronx batters hit at least .300, and eight players had at least nine RBIs. Right fielder Bobby Abreu, the on-base machine, joined the Yankees in a trade a few weeks before the team's huge five-game August series at Fenway Park. Against the five Boston starters, Abreu went 8-for-12 with four walks. Not surprisingly, the Yankees swept the season-turning series.

The bottom line: The Yankees have the talent, experience and momentum to repeat their 2006 performance against the Sox. Not even the Dice-K phenomenon can change that. —Ryan Fagan

A.L.EAST

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

RHP **Jaret Wright** (shoulder) might be on the D.L. for an extended period. For the short term, RHP **Jeremy Guthrie** likely will start in Wright's place. Guthrie throws a low-90s fastball, a slider and a changeup—none of them plus pitches. If Wright is out for a month or more, the club likely will promote a starter from Class AAA.

SCOUTING REPORT: DH **Aubrey Huff** shows decent patience at the plate and has power to left-center and center, though he pulls most of his homers. He doesn't mind being a DH, and his versatility is valuable. He can play first, third and left. —Spencer Fordin



GAIL BURTON / AP

BOSTON RED SOX

The team largely was ridiculed for signing RF **J.D. Drew** in the offseason, but the early returns are positive. Instead of trying to do too much, Drew simply is letting his talent guide him. His smooth lefthanded swing enables him to pepper balls off the Green Monster. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Daisuke Matsuzaka**'s four-seam fastball reaches 95 mph. He throws a big-breaking curveball and uses his slider to put away lefthanded hitters, but his best pitch is a changeup that acts like a screwball. Matsuzaka also throws a two-seam fastball and a cutter. —Ian Browne

TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS

Special assistant **Dave Martinez** is helping OF **Elijah Dukes** adapt to playing under Tropicana Field's Teflon roof. Martinez's primary tip: Don't take your eyes off balls hit to gaps. If an outfielder does that at the Trop, he won't pick up the ball again. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Brian Stokes** is in the bullpen after entering the spring as a contender for the No. 5 starter job. Manager **Joe Maddon** is high on Stokes, who throws a low-90s fastball, change and curve but must improve his command. Maddon believes Stokes has the makeup to be a late-inning reliever. —Bill Chastain

NEW YORK YANKEES

With two more starters—RHPs **Mike Mussina** (hamstring) and **Carl Pavano** (forearm)—on the D.L., the club needs LHP **Kei Igawa** to become consistent quickly. His first start was poor—he seemed to have forgotten what pitching coach **Ron Guidry** taught him in spring training. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RF **Bobby Abreu** has always been a patient hitter, and now that he's on a team that doesn't need him to hit for power, he is doing an even better job of working deep counts and hitting to all fields. In the field, he's an accurate thrower but doesn't have great range. —Bryan Hoch

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

With LHP **B.J. Ryan** (elbow) on the D.L., RHP **Jason Frasor** has moved from primary setup man to closer. Frasor converted 17 of 19 save opportunities for the Jays in 2004. ... LHP **Gustavo Chacin** is working more quickly this season, which has led to some positive results. His pitches per inning and walks are down. **SCOUTING REPORT:** Adam Lind will fill in for LF **Reed Johnson** (back). Lind has a simple, smooth lefthanded swing and is a strong gap-to-gap hitter who has some power. In the field, he's working on improving his routes to balls. —Jordan Bastian



SLEEPERS C Carlos Ruiz, Phillies ➤ 1B Casey Kotchman, Angels ➤ 2B B.J. Upton, Devil Rays ➤ 3B Akinori Iwamura, Devil Rays ➤ SS Tony Pena, Royals ➤

September 28, 1997

The Brewers move out of their league

When the Indians and Angels got together at Miller Park last week to avoid the snow in Cleveland, it was the first game in Milwaukee between American League teams since the Brewers left the junior circuit almost a decade ago. Baltimore and Milwaukee, it should be noted, were two of the eight original A.L. cities in 1901. By 1903, both locales had been abandoned. The Baltimore franchise moved to New York—the original Orioles eventually became the Yankees—and Milwaukee moved to St. Louis. The original Brewers became the Browns and, later, today's Orioles. —Tom Gatto

Baltimore	AB	R	H	RBI
Anderson, CF	4	1	2	1
Reboullet, 2B	4	0	1	1
E. Davis, RF	4	1	2	0
Tarasco, RF	1	0	0	0
Berroa, DH	5	0	0	0
Ripken, 3B	1	1	1	0
Ledesma, 3B	2	1	1	0
Walton, 1B	5	2	2	4
Hammonds, LF	4	1	1	1
Hoiles, C	3	0	0	0
Rosario, C	1	0	0	0
Bordick, SS	3	0	0	0
Totals	37	7	10	7

Milwaukee	AB	R	H	RBI
Vina, 2B	6	1	0	0
Loretta, SS	5	1	4	1
Cirillo, 3B	5	0	0	0
Franco, DH	1	2	1	0
Burnitz, RF	5	1	2	4
Jackson, CF-LF	5	0	2	0
Nilsson, LF	2	0	1	0
Williams, PR-CF	2	0	1	0
Voigt, 1B	3	0	0	0
x-Huson, PH-1B	1	0	0	0
Matheny, C	3	1	2	0
Levis, PH	0	0	0	0
Stinnett, PH-C	1	0	0	0
Totals	39	6	13	5

x-Reached first on catcher's interference.

Baltimore 021 120 010 — 7
Milwaukee 010 041 000 — 6

E: Rosario, Cirillo.
DP: Baltimore 1, Milwaukee 1. LOB: Baltimore 8, Milwaukee 13. 2B: Anderson 2, Ripken, Reboullet, Jackson, Loretta. HR: Walton 2 (3), Hammonds (21), Burnitz (27). SB: E. Davis, Huson.

The O's edged out the Yankees to win the A.L. East in '97; the postseason has been well out of Baltimore's reach since.



Cal checked out of consecutive game No. 2,478 after 3½ innings.

Baltimore	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Key	5	9	5	5	3	4
Rodriguez	2/3	2	1	1	1	0
Rhodes	1/3	0	0	0	0	0
Mills	1/3	1	0	0	0	0
Orosco W, 6-3	2/3	0	0	0	0	1
Benitez	1	1	0	0	1	1
Mathews SV, 1	1	0	0	0	1	0

Milwaukee	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Karl	4	7	4	4	2	3
Wagner	1	2	2	2	0	0
Villone	1	0	0	0	0	1
Reyes L, 1-2	1 2/3	1	1	0	1	2
M. Davis	2/3	0	0	0	0	1
Wickman	2/3	0	0	0	1	1

HBP: Anderson (by M. Davis).

Brady Anderson picked up a bruise—and a game-winning RBI—when he was plunked with the bases loaded in the top of the eighth.

Umpires: Mike Everitt, Larry Young, Rich Garcia, Dale Ford.

Time: 3:22.
Attendance: 15,036.



Julio Franco was still under 40 when he drew a season-high four walks for the Brew Crew.

Proof that \$10 tickets work: The Angels and Indians drew 52,496 for a three-game midweek series in Wisconsin.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

Manager **Ozzie Guillen** says **Brian Anderson** doesn't have to worry—he won't be sent down anytime soon. Anderson is a good bench guy because he's the team's best defensive outfielder.

SCOUTING REPORT: Tadahito Iguchi thrived as the No. 2 hitter the past two seasons because of his ability to handle the bat. Now that he's hitting lower in the order, Iguchi will be just as big of an asset. Iguchi could hit 25 homers because he won't have to do as much situational hitting. He might even reach 20 stolen bases. —Scott Merkin

CLEVELAND INDIANS

Leadoff man **Grady Sizemore** stole 22 bases in both 2005 and '06—and the team wants him to run even more this season. 2B **Josh Barfield** gives the Indians, a team not known for speed and running potential, another basestealing threat.

SCOUTING REPORT: Because RHP **Joe Borowski**, the closer, doesn't overpower hitters—his fastball reaches about 91 mph—he can put a lot of runners on base. But he is effective at locating his pitches, which allows him to work out of jams. —Anthony Castrovine

DETROIT TIGERS

CF **Curtis Granderson** is making contact more often this season because of his shorter swing and more selective approach at the plate. The hitters behind him can move runners regardless of whether they're swinging well, so Granderson has a chance to score a lot of runs as the team's leadoff hitter.

SCOUTING REPORT: RHP **Chad Durbin's** fastball hits 90 mph and has sinking action that can produce ground balls. He also has a breaking pitch that he can spot on the corner to throw off hitters' timing. He is struggling this season because his pitches have been flattening out. —Jason Beck

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

CF **David DeJesus**, who has led the offense so far, is showing improved plate discipline and is hitting the ball to all fields. ... RHP **Joakim Soria**, 22, and RHP **David Riske** will get most of the save opportunities while RHP **Octavio Dotel** (oblique) is out. Soria allowed just one hit in his first five appearances. **SCOUTING REPORT:** C **John Buck** has resumed raising his left leg as he goes into his swing. The leg kick, which isn't as pronounced as it was last season, helps him by serving as a timing mechanism. —Jim Molony

MINNESOTA TWINS

Even though his average is solid, C **Joe Mauer** has yet to find his comfort level at the plate because he isn't seeing the ball well. Instead of trying to force things, Mauer has put down a few bunts in an attempt to spark the team's struggling offense.

SCOUTING REPORT: Glen Perkins likely will return to the rotation, but for now he gives the team a second lefthander out of the bullpen. He can be used in long relief or in a situational role. He throws an 88- to 92-mph fastball, a changeup and a hard curve. —Kelly Thesier



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

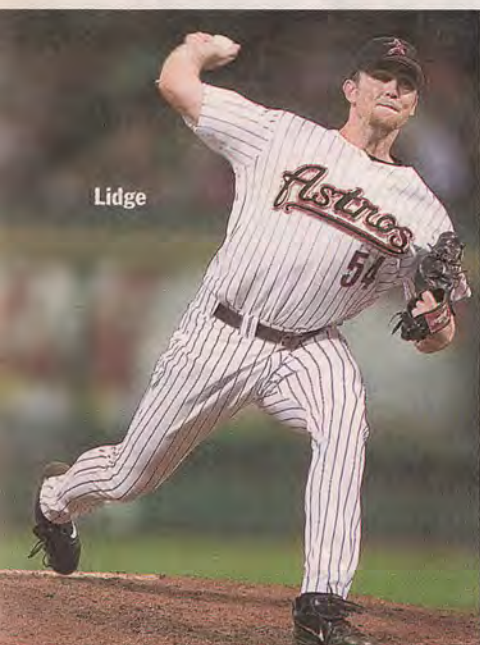
THE CLOSER Todd Jones

Once you give the closer the ball, don't ask for it back

Have you seen what has been happening in Houston? The Astros switched closers, but then it looked as though they were kidding because after the new closer put a guy or two on base, manager Phil Garner had the old closer warming up.

Then the new closer induced a game-ending popup and remained the closer, even though the old closer almost got into the game.

Confused? Try being the closer in Houston.



Lidge

ROBERT SEALE / SN ARCHIVES

watch your back. You can't close when, after you let a guy reach base, you turn around and all of a sudden people are getting up in the bullpen.

You may remember that Brad Lidge and Dan Wheeler were pretty big reasons the Astros went to the World Series in 2005. Garner leaned on those two, and Lidge and Wheeler wouldn't have wanted it any other way. We all know what else happened that October: Albert Pujols took Lidge deep in front of the whole world. The next season, Lidge had his ups and downs and before you knew it, there was a bit of a closer issue in Houston.

Then after two outings this season, Lidge was out as closer and Wheeler was in. Lidge wasn't thrilled, but he understood. On Wheeler's second day as closer, he ran into trouble in a nonsave situation and, boom, Lidge was back up getting loose. If Wheeler's going to be the guy, then Garner needs to stick with it. Wheeler shouldn't be put in limbo, too.

I speak from experience. Last year I scuffled, but my manager, Jim Leyland, stuck with me and, thank goodness, I got myself on track. Closing is so mental, about the only way out of a slump is for the skipper to tell you, "You're my guy. You better figure it out because you're not coming out." When your manager is behind you, you've got a much better chance of turning things around.

If a manager does change closers, he needs to stick with the new guy. It's important that the new guy's treated like the closer.

All closers would like to dominate, but that just doesn't happen much. Skippers need to learn that with closers, you need to be psychologist as much as manager.

Closers are weird to begin with. Unless your name is Rivera, Hoffman, Wagner or Rodriguez, closing is not easy. Neither is managing closers who aren't Rivera, Hoffman, Wagner or Rodriguez. There is a fine line between staying with a guy and letting that guy drive you off a cliff.

But this I know for sure: Closing games is impossible when you have to

Got a question only a player can answer? Ask the one major leaguer who writes a weekly column in a national sports magazine. E-mail Tigers reliever Todd Jones at asktodd@sportingnews.com, then look for his answer at sportingnews.com.

A.L. WEST

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

With RHPs **Jered Weaver** (biceps) and **Bartolo Colon** (shoulder) out, LHP **Joe Saunders** and RHP **Dustin Moseley** have strung together quality starts. Weaver is expected back this week, but RHP **Kelvim Escobar** (shoulder) had to go on the D.L. last week, which underscored the importance of the team's rotation depth.

SCOUTING REPORT: Backup C **Jose Molina** calls an excellent game, has a good rapport with the staff and a strong arm. At the plate, he can spray hits around—and occasionally he'll drive a pitch in his zone. —*Lyle Spencer*



Molina

JOHN CORDES FOR SN

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

1B/OF **Nick Swisher**'s power and discipline led manager **Bob Geren** to move him from sixth to second in the order. LF **Shannon Stewart**, who was the No. 2 hitter, took over as the leadoff hitter for C **Jason Kendall**, who has been struggling and was moved to No. 8. **SCOUTING REPORT:** Swisher, who switch hits, is a better fastball hitter from the left side but handles off-speed stuff better from the right. A plus defender at first base, he also can play every outfield spot, though he's better suited for the corners. —*Mychael Urban*

SEATTLE MARINERS

LHP **Arthur Rhodes**' elbow injury puts **George Sherrill** back in the role of primary lefthanded setup reliever. Sherrill is durable, and his slider and moving fastball make him tough on lefthanded hitters. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Jeff Weaver** throws a sinker, curve, slider and changeup, but he doesn't seem to trust his pitches. He nibbles too much and tries to make the perfect pitch every time. If he doesn't start getting ahead in the count early, he'll be as ineffective for the M's as he was for the Angels last season. —*Jim Street*

TEXAS RANGERS

The team is rotating its outfielders, but **Nelson Cruz** will be difficult to hold out of the lineup. With his ability to produce consistently good at-bats and hit for power, he's a cut above the team's other outfielders—and he's one of its best defensive players. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Vicente Padilla** is known for pitching inside, but the Rangers need him to do a better job of it against lefty hitters. When Padilla tries to throw his fastball inside to lefties, the ball tends to run back over the plate, where they can rope it. —*T.R. Sullivan*

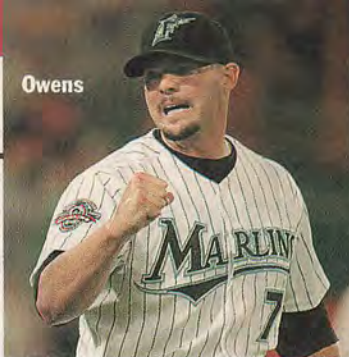
N.L. EAST

ATLANTA BRAVES

RF **Jeff Francoeur**'s plate discipline needs work, but he has shortened his two-strike swing and is more willing to take outside pitches to right field. ... LHP **Macay McBride** seems suited to be a specialty reliever. His curveball is effective against lefties, but righthanders see the pitch better and show more patience against it. **SCOUTING REPORT:** LF **Matt Diaz** doesn't have great range in the field, but that doesn't make him a liability. His arm holds baserunners. He can hit righthanders and lefthanders and could hit 15 homers in his platoon role. —Mark Bowman

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

C **Carlos Ruiz** is starting to play more than **Rod Barajas**. Barajas has a strong arm and is adept at calling games, but his struggles at the plate have prompted manager **Charlie Manuel** to give more playing time to Ruiz, a developing hitter who is a solid defender. **SCOUTING REPORT:** LHP **Cole Hamels** has one of the best changeups in the N.L., and he'll throw it in any situation. His motion is so deceptive that hitters rarely get good swings even when they know the change is coming. Hamels also can set up hitters with his fastball or his slider. —Ken Mandel



FLORIDA MARLINS

Rookie CF **Alejandro De Aza** has the green light to steal, but that doesn't mean he's allowed to be reckless. The coaches have talked to him about not trying to steal third when there are two outs and the top of the order is up. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Henry Owens**, a converted catcher with a short-arm delivery, throws his fastball in the mid- to upper 90s, but his secondary pitches need polish. Owens, who allowed no runs on two hits in his first seven innings, is a possible closer of the future. He needs to sharpen his fielding and do a better job of holding runners. —Joe Frisaro

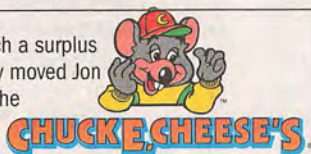
NEW YORK METS

Rookie RHP **Mike Pelfrey**, 23, had an uneven showing in his first start of the season; he allowed six hits and two runs in 5⅓ innings. Pelfrey had some success with his sinking fastball. The key will be for him to improve his breaking stuff. **SCOUTING REPORT:** By not pulling LHP **Oliver Perez** until after he had walked in two runs and forced in another by hitting a batter in the third inning against the Phillies last week, the Mets showed how far they will go to nurse him through his growing pains. Perez, 25, will be given every chance to succeed—and to fail. —Marty Noble

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

Because manager **Manny Acta** shuffled the order to try to jump-start the offense, the third through sixth spots in the order—3B **Ryan Zimmerman**, 1B **Dmitri Young**, RF **Austin Kearns** and CF **Ryan Church**—now offer a right-left balance. **SCOUTING REPORT:** SS **Felipe Lopez** provides speed as the club's leadoff hitter, and he's capable of hitting for power. But since coming to the Nationals from the Reds last summer, he has sacrificed that power and focused instead on making better contact. He can play short and second but is inconsistent in the field. —Bill Ladson

■ The Phillies have such a surplus of starting pitchers they moved Jon Lieber to the bullpen. The Nationals have such a pitching shortage they visited a Chuck E. Cheese's and convinced Jason Simontacchi that a spot in their rotation was more glamorous than cashing in a whiny 4-year-old's 200 skee-ball tickets for a miniature Frisbee. Simontacchi promptly landed on the D.L.



■ Brewers fans get their first chance to welcome back Carlos Lee. Corey Hart, Lee's replacement in the outfield, knows he has some big shoes to fill. Despite his hulking 6-6, 215-pound frame, however, there's no way Hart will ever fill Lee's uniform pants.

■ This is the last chance for Red Sox fans to boo **Johnny Damon** and Co. until June. But it's Doug Mientkiewicz's first chance as a Yankee to retrieve that 2004 World Series ball from its perch at Fenway.

Dream week

April 19-25

THURSDAY, 4/19
Phillies at Nationals

FRIDAY, 4/20
Cardinals at Cubs

SATURDAY, 4/21
Astros at Brewers



SUNDAY, 4/22
Yankees at Red Sox

MONDAY, 4/23
Tigers at Angels

TUESDAY, 4/24
Indians at Twins

WEDNESDAY, 4/25
Padres at Diamondbacks

■ The Cardinals didn't have much success at Wrigley Field last season, but taking extended batting practice in the series opener will help. And, yes, "extended batting practice" is code for "Jason Marquis is starting for the Cubs."

■ Seeking to bring closure to a ridiculous era, the Angels explode a large stuffed Rally Monkey during the seventh-inning stretch. Moments later, the jerseys, hats and pitching hands of Kenny Rogers and Francisco Rodriguez are covered in stuffing.

■ After all of the snowouts, the "home" games in Milwaukee and overall abuse they've taken early in the season, the Indians are actually looking forward to playing in the Metrodome.



■ If you came to see Chris Young in action, you're in luck. Kind of. **Chris B. Young** will play outfield for Arizona, but Chris R. Young won't pitch in this series for San Diego. —Chris Bahr

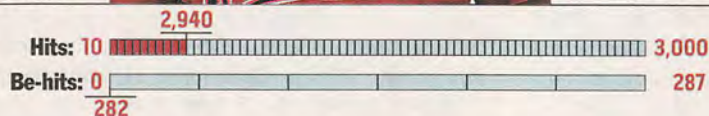
CRAIG BIGGIO

HIT or BE HIT



This is turning into a rout. The hits keep coming for the Astros' second baseman but not the hit-by-pitches. Biggio began the week 60 and 6—hits and HBPs—from two milestones: 3,000 hits and the career record for being plunked.

2007 TOTALS



N.L. CENTRAL

MLB.com

CHICAGO CUBS

SS **Cesar Izturis**, who won a Gold Glove in 2004, had the first 3-error game of his career. In addition to extra fielding work, he must do the little things, such as letting the pitcher know when he's covering second. One of the errors came after RHP **Jason Marquis** didn't know who was covering and hesitated with a throw. **SCOUTING REPORT:** LHP **Rich Hill** has a devastating curveball, but his improved ability to locate his fastball—and his aggressiveness with it—have been keys to his success. Hill also keeps his front shoulder high, which helps disguise his pitches. —Carrie Muskat

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

With six outfielders, it will be tough for manager **Ned Yost** to find innings for **Gabe Gross** and **Tony Gwynn**. At some point, the team might consider sending Gwynn to Class AAA to get more at-bats. ... 2B **Rickie Weeks** has worked on his fluidity and footwork and looks more comfortable turning double plays this year. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Francisco Cordero** is baffling hitters with his slider. He throws the pitch in any count and often catches hitters looking for a first-pitch fastball. His changeup also helps keep batters from waiting for his fastball, which hits 97 mph. —Adam McCalvy

CINCINNATI REDS

Manager **Jerry Narron** sent a clear message to his team when he benched 3B **Edwin Encarnacion** after he didn't run out a first-inning pop up. Encarnacion doesn't have a reputation for dogging it, but Narron will not tolerate a lack of hustle from anyone. ... The emergence of **Josh Hamilton** likely means Narron will use a rotation to get all of his outfielders enough at-bats. That will keep everyone fresh and possibly cut down on injuries. **SCOUTING REPORT:** C **David Ross** has looked terrible at the plate. Not only is he not getting hits, but he's not making contact. **Javy Valentín** could get more starts. —Mark Sheldon



Bay

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

The team's batting average (.230) is among the worst in the N.L. Several players, most notably LF **Jason Bay** (.231), C **Ronny Paulino** (.182) and 1B **Adam LaRoche** (.088) are struggling. LaRoche has been dropped from fourth to sixth in the batting order. ... The Pirates believe RHP **Matt Capps** is a future closer but have no plans to move him out of his setup role for now. **SCOUTING REPORT:** After converting his first four save opportunities, RHP **Salomon Torres** blew a save and took a loss in his next two appearances. Torres believes he was less aggressive in those outings. —Jim Molony

HOUSTON ASTROS

RHP **Dan Wheeler**'s excellent control is a big reason he took over the closer job from RHP **Brad Lidge**. Wheeler doesn't nibble and is particularly aggressive early in counts. Manager **Phil Garner** plans to pitch Lidge often in middle relief—perhaps four out of every eight days—so he can develop some sort of rhythm. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Brian Moehler** abandoned his changeup after elbow surgery in 2003, but he worked it back into his repertoire this spring. Moehler, who can start or relieve, succeeds when he pounds the corners and gets ground balls off his sinker. —Alyson Footer

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

While RHPs **Josh Hancock**, **Russ Springer** and **Brad Thompson** dealt with early slumps, RHP **Ryan Franklin** stepped forward as the top setup man. He throws lots of strikes, which has earned him the trust of the coaches. **SCOUTING REPORT:** Closer **Jason Isringhausen** throws his bread-and-butter cutter, a power curve, a sinker and an occasional changeup. The biggest difference in Isringhausen this year is he's attacking the strike zone after walking or falling behind an inordinate number of batters in 2006. He's also healthier after having offseason hip surgery. —Matthew Leach

TOP 5 Surprises atop the leaderboards

- 1 SS Jimmy Rollins, Phillies.** Who wouldn't expect a Phillie to be No. 1 in the N.L. in home runs, but the leadoff-hitting Rollins, with six, rather than Ryan Howard (1)? Didn't see that coming.
- 2 2B Orlando Hudson, Diamondbacks.** The O-Dog was the Hit Dog to open the season—he started the week with an MLB-best 19 hits. He mixed in some power, too, with three doubles and two homers.
- 3 RHP Todd Jones, Tigers.** The Closer has been The Man; he began the week with a big league-high six saves. And, so far, he hasn't been scored upon.
- 4 LHP Rich Hill, Cubs.** Hill won't maintain his 0.64 ERA—lowest in the N.L.—but he probably will resemble the pitcher who posted a 2.92 ERA in the second half last season.
- 5 SS Tony Pena, Royals.** Four triples in 12 games—pretty good percentage. He'll have to keep running, however, to stay ahead of Jose Reyes and Carl Crawford, Nos. 1 and 2 in the majors last season. —Tom Gatto



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ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

RHP **Jose Valverde**'s velocity is down; he's throwing in the high 80s to low 90s. He is focusing more on command and has adjusted by using his split-finger and two-seam fastballs more. **SCOUTING REPORT:** RHP **Livan Hernandez** doesn't throw his fastball as hard as he used to, but he uses his off-speed pitches to make his fastball, which tops out in the mid-80s, seem harder. Hernandez mixes his pitches well and throws his curveball as slow as 59 mph. His rubber arm allows him to throw well over 100 pitches in a game. —Steve Gilbert

SAN DIEGO PADRES

RHP **Cla Meredith**, who struggled a little against lefthanded hitters last season, has been getting a lot of bite on his sinker and having success running the ball in on the hands of lefties. **SCOUTING REPORT:** With **Josh Bard** (groin) on the D.L., **Rob Bowen** will get the majority of starts at catcher. Bowen has an extremely strong arm, but at 6-3, 225, he struggles to shift quickly enough to block balls in the dirt. That could pose a problem for a staff that has several pitchers, including RHP **Greg Maddux**, whose pitches have a lot of natural movement. —Corey Brock

COLORADO ROCKIES

The club will turn second base over to **Jamey Carroll** while **Kaz Matsui** (back) is on the D.L. Carroll was the Rockies' regular second baseman for much of last season, but he isn't the basestealing threat Matsui is. **SCOUTING REPORT:** Rookie **Jeff Baker**, who can play all four corner positions, has impressed the team as a pinch hitter and spot starter by swinging aggressively at fastballs over the plate. Though he just started playing first base, he may be more comfortable there than in the outfield because of his infield experience in the minors and in college. —Thomas Harding

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

Moving LF **Barry Bonds** back to the cleanup spot provides lefty-righty balance in the lineup, but the team again lacks a true No. 3 hitter. ... LHP **Barry Zito**'s rough start is not a big cause for concern. He was 11-15 with a 5.04 ERA in April in seven seasons with the A's. **SCOUTING REPORT:** 3B **Pedro Feliz** is trying to pull everything and is leaving himself vulnerable to off-speed pitches—even though he focused on improving in that area this spring. Feliz is trying to regain focus and patience, but if he doesn't improve he'll likely find himself on the bench. —Chris Haft



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

There's a lingering hesitancy among the outfielders after a spring training collision between OF **Jason Repko** and SS **Rafael Furcal**. **Matt Kemp**'s shoulder injury—he landed on the D.L. after slamming into the right field fence—has made them more cautious. **SCOUTING REPORT:** LHP **Mark Hendrickson** was a bust as a starter last season, but he began working with a sports psychologist as he moved into a relief role. Now, Hendrickson, who is 6-10, is effective and deceptive as a soft-tosser. He mixes in a curve, changeup and cutter with his fastball. —Ken Gurnick

We're talking about ... Felix Hernandez

The no-hit stuff, the feeble swings by hitters, the zeros and wins piling up—this was expected from Seattle's King Felix last year, even though he was barely past his teen years. But, hey, better late than never, right? At 21, Hernandez still is well ahead of his peers—and he might be the only one from his age group who could throw a 1-hitter against the Red Sox in Fenway and cool Dice-K Fever for a night.

The view from the field ...

Mariners left fielder Raul Ibanez: "He's got that type of No. 1, legitimate-ace, elite-pitcher stuff. He can throw stuff at really good hitters and just make them not look right. I'd come to watch him pitch. You become almost a fan by the way he's pitching. It's awesome to watch."

When other players knew he had star quality ...

Red Sox righthander Joel Pineiro, a former teammate in Seattle: "We knew he had it from the

Hernandez ruled the Fenway mound.

beginning when I was over there. We knew he was a phenom. He lives up to his hype."

The difference between last season and this season ...

Hernandez: "Getting in shape this year, I think that helped me a lot."

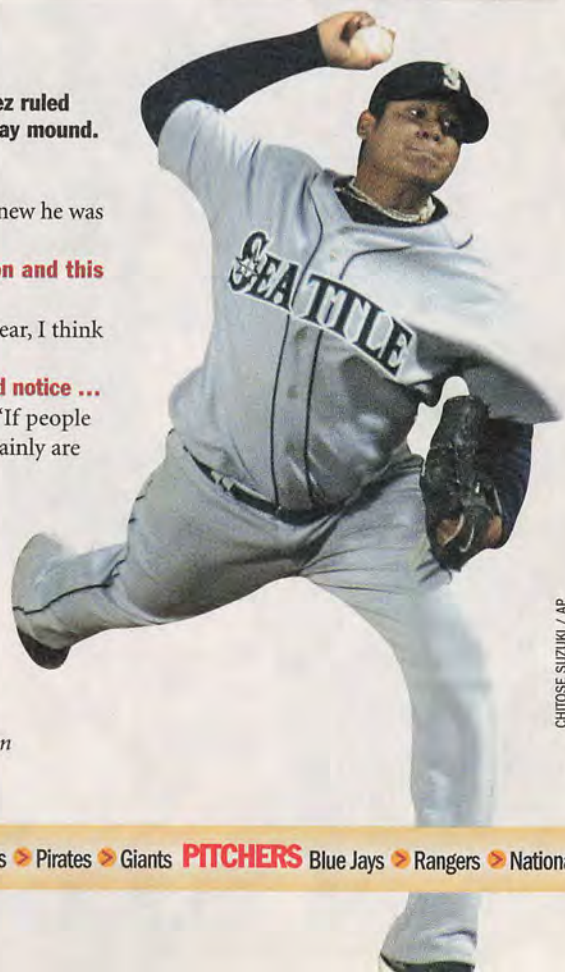
Whether the public will stand up and notice ...

M's first baseman Richie Sexson: "If people weren't watching him before, they certainly are going to watch him now."

How bright his future is ...

Mariners bench coach John McLaren: "For such a young age, to have that much ability and to be in control out there, it tells you what kind of story we're in for here. We're in for great things."

—Steve Kelley, Larry Stone, Jimmy Golen



CHITOSE SUZUKI / AP

FS

UNFAVORABLE SCHEDULES, APRIL 23-29 **HITTERS** Devil Rays > Rockies > Pirates > Giants **PITCHERS** Blue Jays > Rangers > Nationals

The struggle between the Earnhardts is all about control. Junior wants it, Teresa doesn't want to let it go.

DEI drama heats up

By Kenny Bruce

Will he stay or will he go? That's the question for every fan who follows, typically with religious zeal, the career of Dale Earnhardt Jr. Will he re-sign with Dale Earnhardt Inc., the racing organization founded by his legendary father, or will he pack his familiar red Budweiser firesuit and head for greener (financially and otherwise) pastures?

Earnhardt Jr.'s contract with DEI is slated to end with the end of the 2007 season, and the No. 8 team's contract with primary sponsor Budweiser is up for renewal as well. Anheuser-Busch officials aren't expected to begin the renewal process until Earnhardt Jr.'s status at DEI, or somewhere else, is secure. But it's a good bet A-B will stick with Earnhardt—the driver, not the organization.

Officials on both sides of the Earnhardt divide hope to reach an agreement quickly. Kelley Earnhardt Elledge, Earnhardt Jr.'s sister and business manager, has said a new deal needs to be in place by the end of May in order to begin moving forward on sponsor and other related agreements.

Will stepmom Teresa Earnhardt bow to his wishes and fork over at least 51 percent of the company she helped her husband build, or will she hold fast to her control of one of the most recognized, if not successful, organizations in NASCAR, even if it means losing the company's rainmaker?

Earnhardt Jr. brings instant celebrity to DEI, but what else? Say what you want about today's drivers who lack emotion and fan appeal—areas in which the 32-year-old Earnhardt Jr. excels—but in the end, some of those drivers produce where it counts: on the racetrack.

Earnhardt Jr. has two victories in his past 79 starts, dating to the beginning of the 2005 season. During the same stretch, guys such as Jimmie Johnson (12 wins), Tony Stewart (10), Greg Biffle (8) and Kevin Harvick (7) have been

relatively frequent visitors to victory lane.

The truth of the matter is this: Earnhardt Jr. certainly has enjoyed success since joining the Cup series full time in 2000—17 career wins—but the only thing he has won with any consistency

**The truth is this:
The only thing Junior
has won with any
consistency is the most
popular driver award.**



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN

What these fans really want to know is who will be signing Junior's paychecks next season.

is the most popular driver award. Popularity can't be traded for points. Popularity doesn't give a driver automatic entry into the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup. And popularity doesn't win championships.

Recent comments made by Earnhardt Jr. and Earnhardt Elledge indicate they feel DEI is not keeping pace with others in the sport. The term *resources*, as in a lack of, has come up on more than one occasion. But they have been involved in the sport long enough to know resources aren't a cure-all. There are plenty of outfits with bountiful resources that are struggling to keep up with the dizzying pace set by those who are contending for wins every week.

Earnhardt Jr. has a right to expect his voice to carry weight where the present, and future, of DEI is concerned. If his stepmom disagrees, let the bidding begin. **SN**

Kenny Bruce is an assistant managing editor at NASCAR Scene. Read more from Bruce at scenedaily.com.



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INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS:

Mr. Smith cited for a penchant to "go three wide" and pass other motorists in a "lane" that doesn't exist. Sneaks up on vehicles and speeds past them along the outside shoulder without signal or warning - even if it means coming dangerously close to barrier walls.

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INSIDE DISH

Even with multiple teams using brand-new engines, Chevy's dominance continued at Texas. Chevy drivers have won every race but one—**Matt Kenseth** won in a Ford at California. Dodge has only one top five all season, and Toyota has zero.



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN



Kahne

Phoenix is a tough track for teams to figure out because the ends are so different. A team can be good in Turns 1 and 2 or in 3 and 4 but not at both combinations. With the handling characteristics of the Car of Tomorrow still uncertain, many teams likely will be off on both ends. **Kevin Harvick** dominated the flat tracks last season; this will be his first chance to build on that this year. ➤ **Jeff Gordon** has been in position to win the past three races, but at Bristol he spun the tires on the final restart while in second; at Martinsville he had the fastest car but couldn't get around (and didn't go through) **Jimmie Johnson**; and at Texas he dominated early in the race, fell off slightly, regained the lead, then hit the wall late, which ended his chances. On the bright side, Gordon still leads in points, and it appears crew chief **Steve Letarte** has started to make good cars better—instead of worse, as was his habit last season. ➤ **Kasey Kahne's** struggles aren't the kind a team recovers from in the middle of a season. He has been way off at his bread-and-butter tracks—1.5-milers. He has no chance to make the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup. Neither do his Evernham Motorsports teammates, **Elliott Sadler** and **Scott Riggs**.

SPEED reads

David Stremme finally looks like he belongs in the Nextel Cup Series. He's 12th in points, his average finish has improved by nine-plus spots over 2006, and he already has as many top 15 finishes (four) this year as he did all of last year.

Kurt Busch didn't get a top 10 finish to show for it, but his strong run at Texas was big news. It was his best run since Daytona, and with a series of strong tracks for him coming up, he could make a move in the points race.

Tony Stewart vs. Juan Pablo Montoya. This will be good.

Gotta love Kyle Busch's flying around Texas and every other track this season. Please: Nobody tell him what the center pedal is for. —**Matt Crossman**

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Pit box

Fantasy experts Roger Kuznia and Vinnie Iyer pick Nextel Cup race winners.

Who will win at Phoenix?

Vinnie: This is a Car of Tomorrow race, but I'm expecting the Driver of 2006 to continue to roll at this flat track. Kevin Harvick will build on his clean sweep of last season's Phoenix races and make it three in a row in the desert. It will be sweet to see the No. 29 sitting in victory lane again.

Roger: Kyle Busch may hate the Car of Tomorrow, but he loves his two top five finishes in the two COT races this season—including his win at Bristol. Busch qualified on the pole at Phoenix last year and won the fall event in 2005, which makes his Kellogg's machine one to watch on Saturday night.

- **Sleeper:** Carl Edwards.
- **Not so fast:** Ryan Newman.

- **Sleeper:** Clint Bowyer.
- **Not so fast:** Greg Biffle.

Nextel Cup points (based on how the experts' choices finished in points races): Vinnie, 876; Roger, 876.



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Buy! Sell! Go fast! Turn left!

With the first quarter of the NASCAR season in the rearview mirror, here are some insider trading tips for the second quarter: Invest in Chevy, stay away from Red Bull, and dump Evernham. *By Reid Spencer*

Chairman of the floorboard

The man with the heaviest foot is defending Cup champion Jimmie Johnson, who recovered from a crash at Daytona by winning half of the next six races and climbing to fourth in points. The real measure of the No. 48 team came in the first two Car of Tomorrow races. After struggling mightily with the setup at Bristol, then having problems in practice at Martinsville, Johnson and crew chief Chad Knaus asked for help. Jeff Gordon's team gave it to them—and Johnson fought off Gordon to win the race.

NASCAR futures

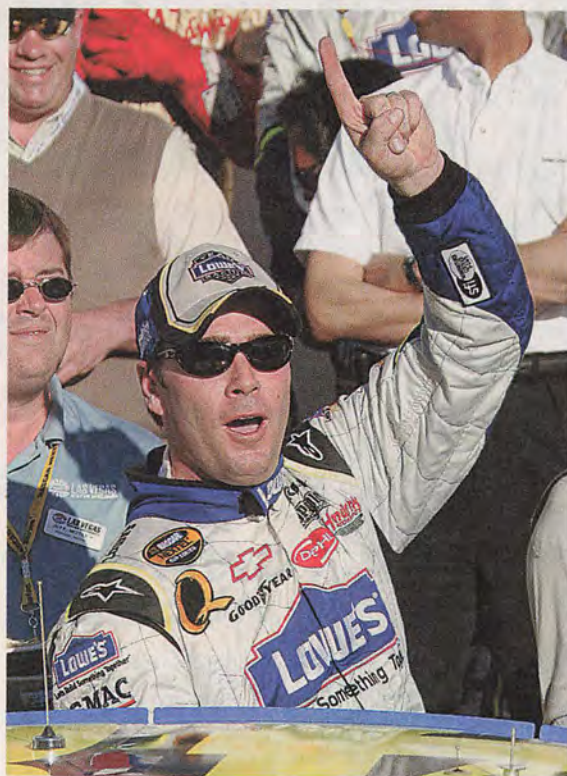
Despite such obvious glitches as melting foam and fragile fuel pump cables, the Car of Tomorrow hasn't been the nuisance many had predicted. Racing at Bristol was tentative in the COT's maiden voyage. The following week at Martinsville, the racing was plenty good, particularly the closing Jimmie Johnson-Jeff Gordon battle. What remains to be seen is how the COT will affect the teams' P/L statements.

Gentlemen's agreement

With an increased emphasis on victories in the seeding of competitors for the Chase, will drivers running second continue to be as gracious and respectful as Jeff Burton and Jeff Gordon were in the first two COT races? As Matt Kenseth was when Burton passed him on the last lap at Texas?



Gordon



HAROLD HINSON FOR SN (2)

Second quarter projections

There are six races left before the midpoint of the Nextel Cup regular season, and four of them take place at Car of Tomorrow race-tracks. Three of those tracks—Phoenix, Darlington and Dover—measure a mile or more and will provide the next real test for the COT because cornering speeds will increase dramatically.

With three wins already, Johnson has shown he will suffer no post-championship blahs.

Golden parachute

There weren't many who believed that Mark Martin would actually bail out of the No. 01 Army car while he was leading in points—but he did.

Stocks on the rise

■ Chevrolet won six of the first seven races.

■ Hendrick Motorsports posted four victories in a row (three by Jimmie Johnson and one by Kyle Busch), and Jeff Gordon claimed the points lead.

■ The Daytona 500 provided the season's most thrilling finish—Johnson's win at Martinsville was a close second—with Kevin Harvick coming from behind and edging Mark Martin at the stripe.

Stocks on the decline

■ Kasey Kahne seemed rudderless during team director Kenny Francis' four-race suspension for infractions found during Daytona qualifying, and the driver of the No. 9 Evernham Dodge is still in danger of falling out of the top 35 in points.

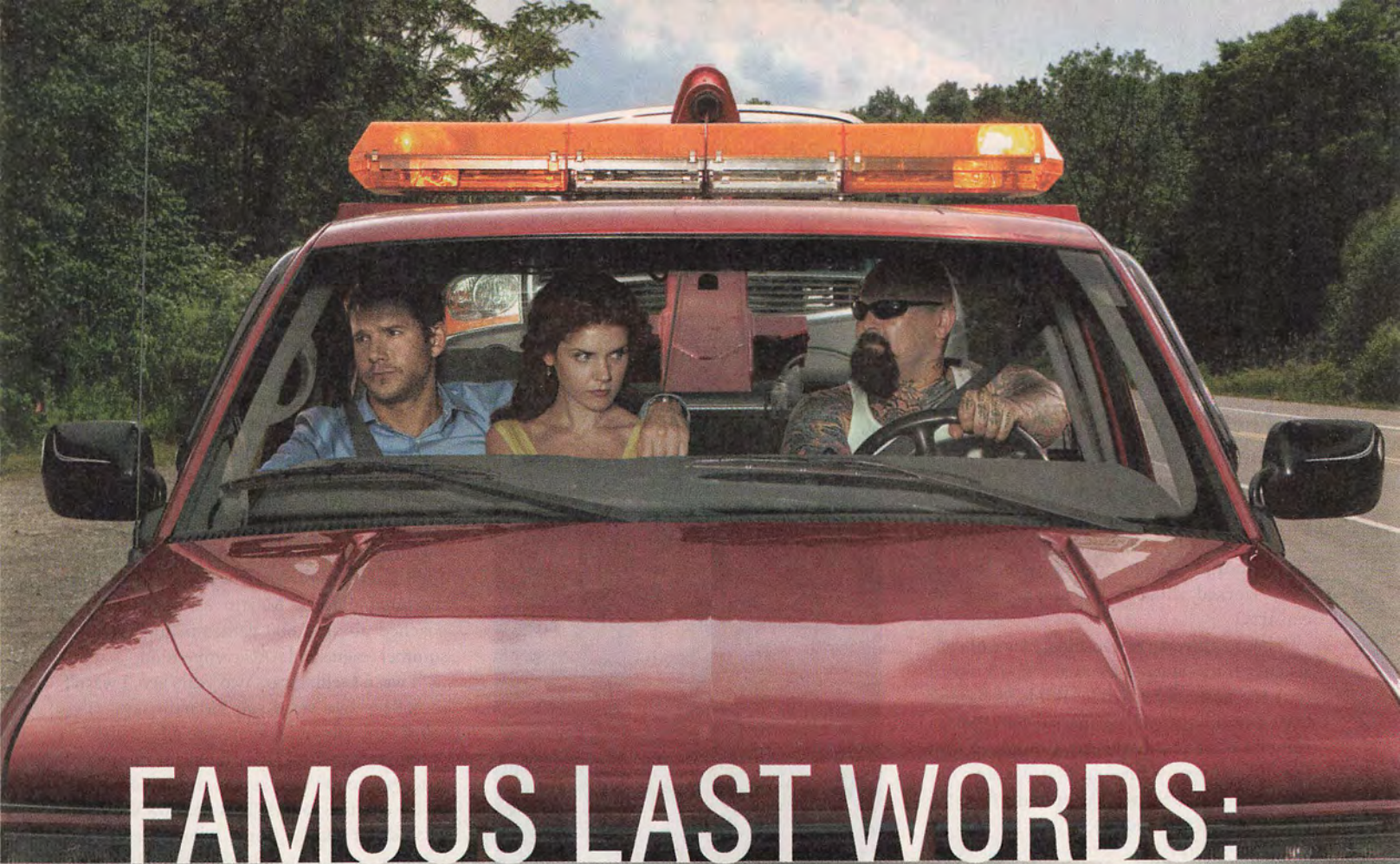
■ Toyota's Cup debut has suffered not only from performance issues but also from a public relations nightmare. Team owner Michael Waltrip was busted for an illegal fuel system additive at Daytona and failed to qualify for the following six races. Just when you thought things couldn't get worse for NASCAR's affable pitchman, he rolled his SUV in the wee hours near his North Carolina home.

■ Based on the hit-or-miss qualifying efforts of AJ Allmendinger and Brian Vickers, it's unlikely we'll see a Red Bull market until at least the third quarter.



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If Frank Martin had replaced anyone other than Bob Huggins, who would care?

It's K-State—why not take a shot?

By Mike DeCourcy

decourcy@sportingnews.com

For Kansas State to promote assistant Frank Martin to head coach was a disgrace to the program's firmly established tradition, a tradition the Wildcats have worked diligently over the years to construct.

It has required an extraordinary level of consistency for K-State to average a 15-15 record over the past 13 years. The Wildcats haven't beaten rival Kansas in Manhattan since 1983, a run of 24 consecutive defeats. Compared with the difficulty of achieving that, UCLA's 88-game winning streak was like ordering from the drive-through at Wendy's.

Hiring Martin demonstrated no respect for this, no respect at all.

"I know I wasn't the media's first choice," Martin says. He is aware of commentators who blasted his promotion following Bob Huggins' departure to West Virginia. They cited Martin's lack of college head coaching experience, scars on his resume from his days as a Miami high school coach—or, more to the point, that his hiring simply was a means of keeping elite talents Bill Walker and Michael Beasley with the 2007-08 Wildcats.

There is no way to know whether Martin will be effective in his new job. It is, however, much easier to be effective with gifted players. Walker,



MATTHEW KUTZ / SN

If promoting Martin resulted in keeping Walker, that's not such a bad thing.

a 6-6 wing, and Beasley, a 6-9 power forward, are more talented than any Wildcat since Mitch Richmond, who finished his career with an Elite Eight loss to Kansas in 1988, which pretty much was the last time before Huggins that anyone had to be concerned with K-State basketball.

This is why hiring Martin and making Dalonte Hill a well-paid associate coach—his connections brought in Beasley and top wing prospect Dominique Sutton—was the only

logical direction. If Martin had left, Walker and the '07 recruits likely would have requested releases and understandably so.

"I'm going to stay here and help Frank Martin get his career off to a good start," Walker says. "He's a great guy, a great coach, and I'm excited to be playing for him." Beasley's mother, Fatima Smith, insists Michael will be headed to Manhattan in mid-July.

Martin faces considerable pressure to succeed immediately because Walker and Beasley have the talent to enter the 2008 NBA draft. This also will be the final season for rugged forward David Hoskins and point guard Clent Stewart.

Fortunately for Martin, he has plenty of coaching experience at other levels. Although he was dismissed from his job at Miami High in 1998 after the program was judged to have recruited players, Martin estimates he has coached about 1,600 games in high school, summer league and AAU competition.

"I wasn't selling cars two years ago. I wasn't in college two years ago," Martin says. "I've called timeouts and prepared people to play."

Kansas State could have hired any number of coaches who followed a more conventional path up the coaching ladder. That was how the Wildcats came upon Tom Asbury and Jim Wooldridge, who preceded Huggins. They lasted a combined 12 years and compiled a record of 168-178. If Martin fails, K-State can get back to that level of mediocrity easily enough. **SN**

speedread

Arkansas turned down a chance to hire Gregg Marshall away from Winthrop because administrators thought the Big South was too far down to reach for a coach. Marshall has gotten Winthrop to the NCAA Tournament seven times since 1999. If you wonder what has happened to the once-glorious Razorbacks program, this is all you really need to know.



TIM LARSEN / AP

SF **Paul Harris'** first season at Syracuse was a bit rocky, but he averaged 7.1 rebounds in only 21.7 minutes per game. That would translate to about 10 rebounds if he were playing starter minutes, which is impressive for a 6-5 freshman. ➤ Quinnipiac hired Connecticut assistant **Tom Moore** and is paying him \$300,000 annually—a lot for a Northeast Conference coach. That has spurred speculation the program is looking to join the Atlantic 10. Three words for that: *not gonna happen*. Quinnipiac landed an excellent coach, but if anything, the A-10 will become smaller in the future

INSIDE DISH

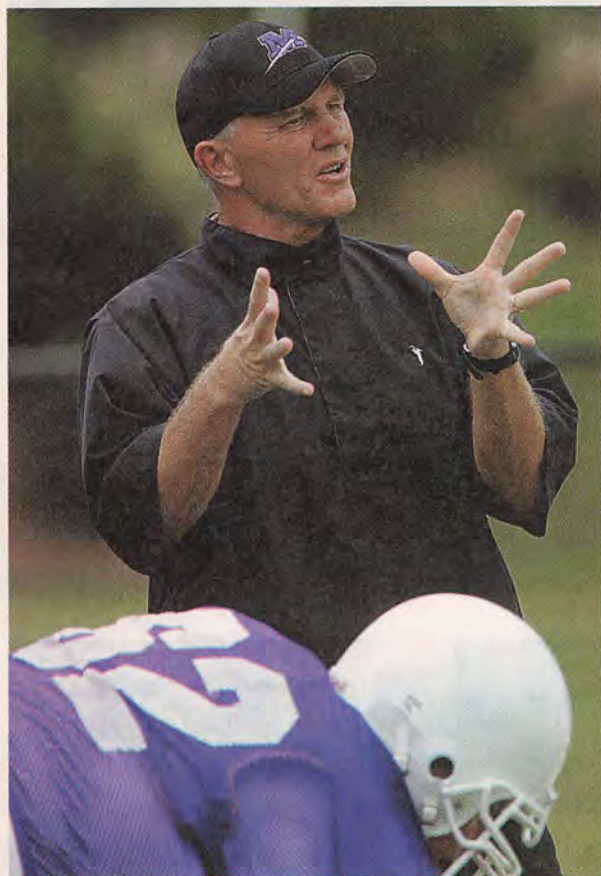
because it is overloaded with bottom-feeding teams. Duquesne, Richmond, St. Bonaventure and La Salle ranked below 220 in the Ratings Percentage Index standings this season. ➤ If Saint Louis were interested in a more comfortable geographic fit than the A-10, the Missouri Valley Conference would welcome the Billikens. ➤ **C Greg Oden's** difficulty staying out of foul trouble during the NCAA Tournament had some analysts calling for the college game to allow players six fouls before disqualification. Those of us who covered the Big East when it experimented with a six-foul rule in the early 1990s can tell you it was an unqualified disaster. The games resembled the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Six fouls is not the answer for what ailed Oden during the NAAs; better officiating is.

For one man from Alabama, happiness is a Division III school in Mississippi.

A job that changed a life

By Matt Hayes

mhayes@sportingnews.com



ROBERTO SOLIS / AP

How Mike DuBose got here really doesn't matter, but for the record, he knew someone who knew someone who needed a defensive coordinator, and the next thing you know, DuBose was the head coach at tiny Millsaps College.

The team hadn't been to the NCAA playoffs in three decades and was staring at irrelevance. The coach who hired DuBose left a year later and begged him to take his place.

Well, why not?

High school games in Jackson, Miss., attract bigger crowds than games at Division III Millsaps, but at least fall Saturdays provide a little slice of fraternity heaven: Behind a chain-link fence, a few yards from the north end zone, is a grassy area where students can watch the game while imbibing.

"They pull their couches up to the fence and have a good time," DuBose says. "I figured maybe we could give them something to yell about."

Did they ever. A conference championship, the first playoff appearance since 1975 and a drastic change in the culture of losing—all in one season.

Yes, DuBose still is a football coach. For those who don't remember, Alabama hasn't won an SEC championship since DuBose's 1999 team. As for the scandals and all that other stuff: He did what he did, Alabama did what it did, and five years later a coaching career thankfully started over.

"Faith," DuBose says, "is understanding that you're not always going to understand everything."

Every once in a while a person gets the chance to begin again—to step off the world, shake life's Etch A Sketch and step back on. It may not be the same place; it

DuBose again is doing what he loves, even if it's in Division III and not the SEC.

may not be the same situation. And it most certainly isn't the same person.

DuBose's office is tucked into a small building off a small stadium in the middle of a posh, private, liberal arts school that made Loren Pope's book *Colleges That Change Lives*. How fitting.

It wasn't so long ago that DuBose and the Tide were stumbling through a meltdown of a season—"Alabama should never win only three games in any season," he says—that reverberates to this day. Now he's on the other side, leading the rebirth of a program and embracing the peace he finally has found.

DuBose used to be bitter about his days coaching his alma mater and how they ended. Then one day, with his faith and the support of his wife, Polly, he realized a coach is a coach no matter where he's calling plays.

Soon enough, he was standing on the sideline, soaked from a celebratory dunking, hugging Polly and watching students desperately try to tear down a goal post at Harper Davis Field.

It may as well have been Bryant-Denny Stadium. "Championships all feel the same," DuBose says.

No matter where you win them. **SN**



As an elite high school offensive lineman, **Antonio Logan-El** dropped a Maryland hat on the floor on national TV—and in front of a restaurant full of Terps fans—when he announced his decision to play at Penn State. Now Logan-El, who says he'll ask for his release from Penn State after redshirting last season, is interested in Maryland again. Let's hope coach **Ralph Friedgen** tells Logan-El no thanks. ➤ Overlooked amid Rutgers TB **Ray Rice**'s Heisman hype is the loss of FB **Brian Leonard**, a terrific lead blocker who also gave Rice a breather by playing some tailback. It likely will take more than one player to replace Leonard. The staff is excited about FB **Jack Corcoran**'s development, but TB **Kordell Young** was inconsistent as Rice's backup last season. Incoming freshman **Mason Robinson** could be a factor in fall camp. ➤ Tulsa QB **Paul Smith**, one of the game's most underrated players, has adjusted quickly to new coordinator **Gus Malzahn**'s spread offense, but neither the line nor the defense is in good enough physical condition to keep up with the no-huddle. The offensive line is wearing down too soon. The defense likely won't face anything like this in a game, but it's stuck having to play against the offense in practice.

speedread

Here's the best way to recognize the enormous contributions Eddie Robinson made to college football: Name the crystal football given to the national champions after him.



Recruiting season lasts all year. Get the scoop from Mike Farrell on high school happenings at sportingnews.com.



JOHN CORDES FOR SN

EXP • SURE

A day to celebrate

Only one Dodger wore 42—the loneliest number in baseball—on April 15 60 years ago. Jackie Robinson was 0-for-3 with a sacrifice bunt for Brooklyn, but his impact on the game that day was far less significant than his impact on The Game. Robinson's single box score line signaled that major league sports had been integrated and brought a jolt of visibility to the nation's civil rights movement. Major League Baseball paid tribute to No. 42 last Sunday with Jackie Robinson Day. Individual players throughout baseball and three entire teams—the Dodgers, of course, plus the Cardinals and the Brewers—brought Robinson's number out of retirement.



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

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